

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

his personality and work

by

PROFESSOR V. LESNY

Translated by

Guy McKeever Phillips

With a foreword by

C. F. Andrews

LONDON: GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN LTD

FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1939

All rights reserved

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
UNWIN BROTHERS LTD , WOKING

FOREWORD

MORE than fifteen years ago, I remember the time when Dr. Winternitz, the Professor of Sanskrit in the German University at Prague, came over from Europe to spend an academic year with us at Santiniketan in Bengal. Soon after his arrival a younger Sanskrit scholar, Dr. Lesný, who is the author of this book, came to live with us also. Both of them found the peaceful atmosphere of the *Asram* and its surroundings full of rest after all the horrors of the world war in Europe. Dr. Winternitz, who was much older than his friend, was at that time, undoubtedly, the greatest Sanskrit scholar in Central Europe. He was the writer of a standard work on the History of Sanskrit Literature. I remember well his great delight at living with us, sharing our homely ways and simple habits as far as he was able to do so. We all grew very fond of him and he carried back to Europe some of the happiest memories of his life, which was suddenly cut short, soon after the death of his devoted wife, only a short time ago.

Dr. Lesný was junior in every way to Dr. Winternitz. His time with us was equally fruitful. He had already advanced very far in his Sanskrit studies, under the guidance of Dr. Winternitz, before he came out to Bengal. His intimate knowledge of Sanskrit proved of

great benefit to him while he was making a study of the Bengali language. For more than 80 per cent of Bengali words are 'of Sanskrit origin. Since he learned very rapidly to read, write, and speak Bengali, it was possible for him to enter into the thoughts of the poet, Rabin-dranath Tagore, not only through conversation with him, but also through the medium of his Bengali writings. He was able, further, to gain accurate information about the poet from those who had spent their lives at Santiniketan as teachers and students, because there was no insuperable difficulty of language intervening between them and himself. This made his stay at Santiniketan one of ever-growing companionship with the senior staff at the *Asram*. They were eager to impart to him their own knowledge of their *Gurudev's* songs and also of his philosophical writings. All this led to his coming out again to us, when the occasion offered, and renewing his friendships with us.

Without this background of personal knowledge of the whole atmosphere of Tagore's plays and poems, Dr. Lesný could hardly have written this book, wherein he has tried to give a literary estimate of Tagore's greatness, not only for the benefit of Central Europe, but also for the whole world. This is what has made the book so valuable and has called for its translation into English. It has not been merely written by a scholar in his study, it springs out of the living experience of the writer, who has actually resided at Santiniketan along with the poet and, therefore, is able to tell about the things which he has seen and heard and known. His deep devotion to Tagore is evident in every page, and thus this volume

Foreword

forms a remarkable tribute of affection from a ~~writer~~ of another race and another country; for he has written not only with his mind, but with his heart. Enthusiasm for his subject is evident, and yet the book is no less objective and critical on that account.

It has always to be remembered by Western readers that most of Tagore's writings have never been translated into English at all. Even the songs in *Gitanjali*, the *Crescent Moon*, and the *Gardener*, whereby Tagore first became famous in the West, are much fuller and longer in their Bengali form than in the English version made by the poet with such singular beauty of music and rhythm. Because of that beauty of diction we have come to look upon Tagore as a writer of English—and such, indeed, he is. But what we have read in our own language is but a fraction of the whole of his literary work.

Up to the age of fifty, Tagore hardly ever wrote in English. Even to-day, most of the poems and plays that he composes in Bengali either remain untranslated or else are translated by others. It is true that, in recent times, Tagore has written essays and addresses directly in English with a master hand. But these are still the exception; and all through his immensely fruitful career he has done his greatest work in his own mother tongue. English remains a foreign language to him in spite of his marvellous command of its idiom and rhythm.

Thus, Dr. Lesný, in this volume, has given us in the West his own literary criticism and appreciation of an immense amount of Tagore's original Bengali writings about which Western readers have had very little know-
ledge before. A whole field of the poet's activities and

Foreword

adventures in Bengali literature has been opened out to us and we have at last a full and comprehensive idea of his works. For this we are profoundly grateful to him, because it makes us see Rabindranath Tagore through European eyes in all the vast range of his genius.

I would wish to add one personal note in conclusion. It has been my happiness and privilege to be admitted into the friendship which both Dr. Winternitz and Dr. Lesný have shared with Rabindranath Tagore; and for this reason my dear friend, the author of this volume, has asked me to write this Foreword to the English edition of his work.

C F ANDREWS

SANTINIKETAN

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
<i>Foreword</i>	5
<i>Introduction</i>	11
1 INTELLECTUAL AND LITERARY TENDENCIES BEFORE RABINDRĀNATH TAGORE	15
2 YOUTH	34
3 MATURITY	66
4 LOFTIER THEMES <i>Devotion to Public Works</i>	115
5 FAME AND WORLD-WIDE RECOGNITION	173
6 RESTLESSNESS <i>The Idea of Viśvabhāratī</i>	215
7 THE AUTUMN OF LIFE	257
8 CONCLUSION	285
<i>Index</i>	287

INTRODUCTION

WHEN, at the beginning of the second half of last century, Ferdinand de Lesseps unfolded before the world the plan of a connection between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, cultural as well as commercial reasons were among his motives. But as it happened the Orient has been brought within our sphere technically much quicker than it has intellectually. Even Kipling's word that 'never the twain shall meet' has been interpreted in a sense quite foreign to the intentions of its coiner, who himself did so much to familiarize the West with the spirit of India.

Of those who struggled for a closer understanding between East and West in cultural matters, it is undoubtedly Rabindranath Tagore to whom the greatest merit attaches. His literary activities have yielded a bountiful harvest which has been added to by each successive year.

To present this many-sided personality has been my task.

In this task I have not lacked guides or helpers. In addition to Edward Thompson's valuable work, *Rabindranath Tagore, Poet and Dramatist* (London, 1926), and his earlier, shorter work: *Rabindranath Tagore. His Life*

Introduction

and *Work*, which unfortunately cover Tagore's work only up to the end of 1925, my most reliable source has been Tagore's own writings, his *Reminiscences*, the *Śantiniketan Patrika* or the *Viśvabharati Quarterly*. Another valuable help was the leading Bengali monthly, the *Modern Review*, and particularly the *Golden Book of Tagore* published in 1931 to commemorate the poet's seventieth birthday. Many interesting observations about Tagore's literary work may be found in Priyaranjan Sen's instructive work *Western Influences in Bengali Literature* (University of Calcutta, 1932). Tagore's religious opinions are best presented in S. Radhakrishnan's *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore* (Macmillan & Co., London, 1918), or Sushil Chandra Mitter's *La pensée de Rabindranath Tagore* (Paris, 1930), but naturally none of the books and articles dealing with this remarkable man can entirely pass over this point. Their number is by now legion and each has contributed something. I regret that it has been impossible for me to utilize a work which promises to be very instructive, *Rabi-raśmi*, by the Bengali writer Charuchandra Bandyopadhyaya (Calcutta, 1938). Bandyopadhyaya, adopting the method of a chronicler as I have done here, has at the time of writing covered only the early stages of Tagore's poetical work. Tagore's dramatic work is discussed by P. Guha-Thakurta in his *Bengali Drama, Its Origin and Development* (London, 1930).

The present description of Tagore's personality and work is based on the Bengali editions of his works. For this reason a work is always described by its Bengali

title, and the Bengali spelling has been adopted for Bengali names. "Gītāñjali", for example, denotes the original Bengali work, whereas "Gitanjali" (Song Offerings) means the collection of religious songs published in English in 1913. The specimens of Tagore's literary work, too, have been translated from the Bengali originals, and only in a few cases where an English translation exists (especially in the case of Tagore's own translations of certain poems) have I considered myself under obligation to use these versions. The majority of Tagore's translated work has been published by Messrs. Macmillan & Co., London, to whose courtesy I am indebted for permission to reproduce.

I wish to take this opportunity of expressing warm thanks to the Reverend C. F. Andrews, Tagore's intimate and a great friend of India, for consenting to write a Foreword to this book and in this way giving it the stamp of his approval.

My thanks are also due to Dr. Amulyachandra Sen, at present lecturer in Bengali at the Oriental Institute, Prague, for all the help which he has given me during the writing of this book. And I thank Messrs. Allen and Unwin for arranging for its publication.

That this book could be issued in English at all is thanks to the labours of Mr. G. McKeever Phillips, who has kindly taken care of its translation from the Czech.

To write this book has been a grateful task for me. In writing it, I have been fascinated both by the inspiration in which Tagore's literary work is rich and by the charm of his personality, which is equally evident in

Introduction

his pure humanity and in his philosophy. Tagore has sung for the sons and grandsons of his country, not merely for his own generation, and he leaves them both a rich heritage. To-day the evening hours of his life are striking, but it is to be hoped that it will yet be long before the evening of his life becomes night.

V. LESNÝ

Chapter One

INTELLECTUAL AND LITERARY TENDENCIES BEFORE RABINDRANATH TAGORE

BENGAL, a plain at the foot of the Himalayas on the north-east coast of India, enjoys plenty of sun and adequate moisture, particularly in the lower reaches of the Ganges and Brahmaputra rivers, which rush from the snowy Himalayan peaks to the fertile plain; some districts of Bengal are among the most verdant in the world. This country was thickly populated from time immemorial; to-day it has 52 million inhabitants. Its people are good-looking and even handsome, kind-hearted and talented, but at the same time easily inflamed and thirsty for every novelty. The Mohammedan element gained access to the country, and with the Mohammedan supremacy in the first centuries of the new era became very powerful there; in Bengal to-day, therefore, there are two elements, Hindu and Mohammedan, numerically about equally strong, which have a number of cultural ties.

In the eighteenth century, after the battle of Plassey (1757), the English took possession of Bengal. With European rule the influence of European culture made itself felt, and conditions in Bengal began to change.

The end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century were therefore for Bengal a very interesting period. Side by side with the disintegration of the old political power came a growing lack of self-confidence; the old order weakened, dissatisfaction with local conditions grew and local social circumstances were felt to be onerous. The Indian suddenly perceived a distant world with a different culture and different civilization, which it seemed to him played a great part in the acquisition of temporal power, before which the old spiritual order of the country had to give way. Part of the young generation allowed the spell of this power to enchant it and proceeded to proclaim the alleged futility and worthlessness of the old religious opinions, demanding a repudiation of the past. It intentionally ignored the country's earlier social and religious reformers of former times, and lost patience and belief in the efficacy of reforms. It seemed to these young men that the period of reconstruction was over and that the time had come to rebuild the old structure from its foundations. But this young generation was not strong enough to create an entirely new building. It inclined to European theories, considering them a higher and better philosophy of life than the opinions inherited from its ancestors.

At the same time new political centres were formed. In Bengal, Calcutta gained importance, at the beginning of the second half of the eighteenth century still a provincial settlement of no importance, consisting of a European commercial quarter and three or four native villages, at the end of the eighteenth century it became a centre of trade, and government offices were

transferred there. The town expanded considerably and gradually became a centre of religious life also. In this way a new class of educated townsmen came into being, which assumed spiritual leadership, previously in the hands of the lower classes. From Europe, which had been swept by the French Revolution, there penetrated, although only slowly, new ideas; in this manner the way was paved for a new era in Bengal, the echoes of which were to resound in other parts of India as well. Under these circumstances, naturally, a great keenness to learn English was felt; for at that time an atmosphere of commercialism pervaded India. This desire first grew out of practical considerations, not for cultural reasons or as the result of governmental compulsion. For those who knew English were better able to trade with the English merchants. There was a great demand for English books, which the English missionaries met, sometimes even tearing up English periodicals and giving complete stories to the applicants.

In the year 1814 Rammohan Ray left the services of the East India Company and settled down in Calcutta. He was a great pioneer of social reforms, and has left present-day India a rich intellectual inheritance. He was born in 1772, of ancient family, at Radhanagar, not far from Burdwan, in Bengal. His paternal ancestors were courtiers. The usual fate of courtiers in India is to bask for a time in the sun of their ruler's favour and acquire riches, then to lose favour, which entails their fall and subsequent poverty. His mother's family, however, were poor Brahmins, who, devoted to a religious life, sought neither for high positions nor for riches. In Rammohan

Ray's life the influence of both made itself felt. The father desired his son to follow in the steps of his paternal ancestors, so he was sent to the Mohammedan school at Patna, to study Persian and Arabic, which everyone who wished to embark upon the career of a courtier at the court of some Mohammedan prince in India at that time had to know. It was the atmosphere of this Mohammedan environment which induced him, when only sixteen, to write a Persian treatise against idolatry. He subsequently acquired some wealth in temporal service, and on the example of his maternal ancestors devoted himself to the struggle for the moral betterment of mankind. In this struggle, Christianity exerted considerable influence over him. He rejected the Christian belief in miracles, however, and considered its dogma of the Trinity a remnant of paganism. He had in mind a sort of ideal universal religion combining the monotheistic principles of Islam, ancient Indian philosophy, and Christian ethics. He combated the popular idolatry of Hinduism, and spiritless superstition, but not enlightened pantheism or the polytheism which sees images of the gods merely as symbols, and perceives behind a plurality of gods the divine unity expressed by the ancient Indian phrase *tat tvam asi* ("that is you"). He admitted that a symbol can affect the feelings, and understood that even an educated Englishman (as, for example, Colonel Stewart at the beginning of the nineteenth century) can succumb to the spell of Hinduism. The British officers of those days, in particular, appreciated Hinduism, perhaps because they were in much closer contact with the Indians than the other British residents.

Intellectual and Literary Tendencies

Rammohan Ray, however, realized the difficulties concealed by a double, i.e. a popular and enlightened religious conception, and therefore argued that it is necessary to reject belief in polytheism and to believe only in one infinite, supremely just divine being. He said that this was the teaching of some of the old religious tracts, the so-called Upanishads. He considered the many different idolatrous Indian customs a perversion of their original pure teaching. He maintained that it is foolish to sacrifice a goat before the statue of a god, if I can sacrifice my passions. He also proclaimed that true Indian religion does not demand asceticism or seclusion in the woods for the purpose of achieving a religious life, and that the home and human society are a suitable environment for the religious individual. He translated the Upanishads from Sanskrit into Bengali, and as he wrote his dissertations in Bengali as well, he became one of the founders of Bengali prose. In 1828, together with a handful of other Indians of similar opinion, he founded a monotheistic society called "Brahmasabha," and on August 20, 1828, a church was opened in Calcutta, in which there was no statue of any god, dedicated to "the cult of the only eternal Brahman, who has no equal and is the originator and preserver of the world." Once a week there were services in the church, at which old religious writings were read and interpreted. By founding this monotheistic sect he compelled the orthodox Indians themselves to work for their religious regeneration, and thus contributed indirectly to the regeneration of Hinduism.

Rammohan Ray tried not only to reform Hinduism,

but also to carry out social reforms. He and Dvarkanath Tagore, the grandfather of the poet Rabindranath Tagore, succeeded in 1829 in inducing Lord Bentinck to forbid Bengali widows to sacrifice themselves with the dead bodies of their husbands on the funeral pyre. Such a prohibition was not easily proclaimed. For the British Government had solemnly undertaken not to encroach upon either the religious customs or the social habits of the country. In 1830 Rammohan Ray went to England, where the charter of the East India Company, which was to determine the method of the East India Company's rule in India for a long period, was again to come up for discussion. Rammohan Ray was also entrusted by the Great Mogul with the task of defending his interests in England. In Europe Rammohan Ray was received with respect and appreciation. His explanations of the judicial and taxation systems in India and of the conditions in which the Indian people live awoke great interest. His criticisms of the East India Company's administrative and colonization policy were penetrating and constructive. He demanded that the British in India should not only govern, but also educate the Indian people. He unfortunately died during his stay in England (on September 27, 1833), so that this Indian, who is undoubtedly one of the makers of the spiritual history of mankind, whose efforts at enlightenment are part of the universal heritage of enlightenment, was buried in Europe. The inscription on his tombstone at Bristol says that in profound and firm belief in divine unity he devoted his whole life to the cult of the One Divine Spirit.

His movement was for a time without a leader. It

started to prosper once more, when, a few years afterwards, it was taken up by a philosopher, the noble Debendranath Tagore (1817-1905), the descendant of an old-established family whose members had been entrusted with important positions during the Mohammedan rule. For this reason the orthodox Hindus, too, proclaimed them outcaste. Obviously under the influence of Islam, this progressive family combated the idolatry in Hinduism. Debendranath Tagore, too, believed in one personal God, but did not appreciate the influence of Christianity like Rammohan Ray, on the contrary, he combated it. The Persian poets very much attracted him, but did not fully satisfy his contemplative spirit. Not even the Upanishads completely satisfied him; he selected certain passages only from them as a basis for his religious opinions. This is quite comprehensible, for these old philosophic tracts are not all cast in the same mould. In the Vedas, the oldest Indian religious relics, there is no belief in reincarnation and karma, and therefore even Debendranath, who valued these old hymns in the religious texts very highly, did not believe in this law of ultimate recompense for good and evil deeds. In 1839, with his brothers and some other friends, he founded a society whose aim was to spread recognized truths and to work for a purification of Hinduism. In 1845, together with other Indians of similar opinions, he founded a religious society, "Brahmasamaj," i.e. the society of brahmas or believers in Brahman. Brahmasamaj was a strictly monotheistic sect; its teaching was founded more on sentiment than on intellect.

Intellectual and Literary Tendencies

The victorious progress of Christianity in Bengal was temporarily checked. The old Vedas, which had become the subject of enthusiastic study in Europe as well, were ardently studied; in consequence of this study Debendranath had to abandon his belief in their infallibility. Orthodox India did not at first consider Brahmasamaj an independent sect, but rather a reform movement within Hinduism.

Debendranath Tagore was also convinced that Indian social life needed reform, but advocated prudent reflection. The slow progress of reform, however, did not appeal to his younger collaborators. The most prominent of these was Kesabchandra Sen (1838-84), who joined the movement in 1857. He was a restless and inflammable spirit, and his development was strongly influenced by ~~the~~ environment in which he grew up. Orphaned at an early age, he was educated in a British school. In his case Christian influence is quite clear. Kesab actually calls himself a servant of Jesus, and argued that Christianity is not a European religion, but an Asiatic religion, because Jesus was born and worked in Asia. He said that in Christ the continents should find union. After a sermon of his on the theme "Jesus Christ, Europe and Asia" in 1866 a schism took place in Brahmasamaj. The sect split up into a smaller, conservative section, the so-called Adibrahmasamaj (original Brahmasamaj) and the more numerous Kesab section, which became more and more estranged from the Indian principle of teaching and Indian social structure.

But in Kesabchandra Sen's heart a fundamental change was preparing. He started maintaining that he

Intellectual and Literary Tendencies

had a special mission in the world. He took to meditation in the old Indian manner, throwing himself into a state of ecstasy, in which it seemed to him that he saw the ancient prophets, among them John the Baptist, Christ and the Apostle Paul. In this he was once more closer to Hinduism, the principles of which he had in the preceding years tended more and more to abandon. This led to a new schism in the heart of the movement, particularly when, in 1878, a marriage was concluded between the sixteen-year-old Maharajah Nripendranarayan Bhupa of Kuchbehar and Keśabchandra Sen's fourteen-year-old daughter Sunitidebi, although the sect condemned child-marriages. As, however, a number of other points of dispute had arisen in the meantime, the adherents of sweeping reform seceded from him and founded the so-called Sadharansamaj (Universal Church), a sect with anti-Christian tendencies which rejects all intermediaries between the individual and God, and maintains that God does not even ask for any particular worship. This new sect, the principal representative of which at that time was the self-sacrificing and noble-minded Śibanath Śāstri, prospered and became the strongest of the three sects of the old Brahmasamaj. Although much of what Brahmasamaj originally struggled and strove for has now been already accomplished, its influence in public life is considerable even to-day.

At that time, in the eighties of last century, a number of currents of thought arose in Northern India, partly intermingled, partly independent. The movement headed by Dayanand Sarasvatī (1824-83) drew support from the national consciousness and sought a firm foundation

in the sacred books of the country. Dayanand Sarasvati proclaimed a national theism. He taught the infallibility of the Vedas and metempsychosis, in conscious contrast to the opinions of Debendranath Tagore. In 1875 he founded the first Aryasamaj, and this national religion extended to Western and Northern India, particularly the Punjab, Delhi and Agra, in the higher classes of Indian society, preparing a renaissance of Hinduism. In consequence of its influence, conversions to Christianity in these districts are ceasing, but so are the conversions to the progressive sects.

Indigenous religion in Bengal found support from another direction. Ramakrishna (1833-86), a poor Brahmin from a remote Bengali village, originally called Gadadhar Chattopadhyaya, wished to infuse new life into the old teaching of the great unity of this world. He was not learned, but was untainted with selfish aims and had an unusually receptive mind. He found his spiritual leader in Chandidas (a Hindu sage of the fourteenth century), who, inflamed by a worldly love, tried to achieve purification in mystical love of divine beauty, and in Chaitanya (1486-1534) who sang of mystic unity with God. Man is full of desire for union with God. This desire can be satisfied in two ways: by ecstatic exercises in the manner of the old mystics, or by ardent worship of the divine substance in its human form, mainly in the shape of the goddess Kali, the sacred mother, of the maternal aspect of the creative principle, the ancient force of all origin and happening in the world. Ramakrishna preached that the manifestations of this divine mother are infinite and not limited

Intellectual and Literary Tendencies

to India, and that all religions contain similar fundamental elements, which if fulfilled lead to salvation. This teaching consequently had a national significance as well, for it might unite the Hindus and Mohammedans. Ramakrishna devoted himself to the service of this visible manifestation of divinity with the whole fervour of his visionary spirit. He selected beautiful passages from the old books and gave them a new meaning. Thus, for example, he answered the question whether the religious pilgrimages recommended by the old texts are necessary by saying: "It is the sanctity of those who visit these places which makes them holy. How otherwise could a place purify a man?" Like all religious reformers, Ramakrishna had a profound social consciousness, and emphasized that man must find himself in God, must remove the barriers which separate him from his fellow men, and must revive divinity not only in himself, but also in his neighbour. He thought that the majority of India's evils spring from hyper-individualism, which must be superseded by a new, profounder social consciousness. And in truth this is the struggle which progressive India has fought from Rammohan Ray to Gandhi.

Ramakrishna was soon surrounded by a group of disciples, whom this simple mystic loved as a father. After the master's death in 1886 his disciples organized themselves as a religious community and set themselves the task of making his teaching known, not only to India, but to the whole world.

This idea of a religious universalism was born in Ramakrishna's community evidently under the influ-

ence of the new views conceived by Keśab in the last years of his life, when he once more abandoned the Hindu foundation of his teachings. In 1883—less than a year before his death—Keśab delivered a new message from Asia to Europe. Christian Europe, he said, grasped only one side of Christ's teaching—the unity of Christ and God. But it did not understand Christ's unity with humanity. And that is the great message which Asia, the continent from which Christ came, proclaims to Europe. not only the union between man and God, but also the union between man and man. Asia calls to Europe. "Sister, let us be one in Christ!" As there is one recognized scientific truth, so, Keśab said, there should be one religion. First, however, he wanted to give India itself religious unity, and his "New Dispensation" ("Nababidhan") laid down moral rules for all Indians. It was adapted to the Indian spirit and to the peculiarly Indian system of caste. The influence of the West was evident in the language. Whereas Debendranath, in his religious interpretations, used his mother tongue, Bengali, Keśab wrote in English. But India was not yet ready, and the reformer's energy was already waning.

Whereas Keśab's eclectic universalism has a Christian basis, the universalism of Ramakrishna's disciples was rooted in the soil of India, nourished by the growing national self-confidence and fortified by the progress of Brahmasamaj. The banner of this universalism was held aloft by Narendranath Datta (1862–1902), whose name within the order (which, however, was not given to him until immediately before his journey to the

Intellectual and Literary Tendencies

United States in 1893) was Svami Vivekananda. The Parcae bestowed on him all that a man can want in life, but allowed him only a short span of life.

When Ramakrishṇa's disciples decided to make his teaching known, not only to India, but to the whole world, and founded a special order of service to humanity, Vivekananda was among the foremost, having abandoned Brahmasamaj, which he considered was starting to pay too much attention to rationalism. He represented Hinduism at the Chicago "Congress of all religions" in 1893, and accused the representatives of the various confessions of religious narrowmindedness. They all, he said, praise only their own confession and their own God. He alone speaks of the God of all, of universal religion, which teaches mutual understanding and a peaceful life. In Vivekananda's opinion only such a religion is the Hindu teaching of the common foundation of everything earthly in the new form of a spiritualized universalism, in which science and religion unite in love for all humanity and in compassion for everything, the banner of such a religion would bear the watchword of mutual help, comprehension, harmony and peace. In this way Vivekananda's Hinduism emerged from its isolation and became apostolic. This at the same time announced the renaissance of Hinduism.

Islam in India had even before this been the cradle of movements aiming at a reconciliation of Islam with Hinduism and Christianity. At the court of Akbar (1556-1605) Islamic mysticism became Indianized; this emperor's idea of creating on the foundation of Islam, Hinduism and Christianity a new religion to unite all

Intellectual and Literary Tendencies

Indians, is generally known. Still more than Akbar and his faithful circle of "truth seekers," Darashikoh, the eldest son of the emperor Shahjahan (1628-58), fell under Indian influence; he interpreted verses of the Koran in the spirit of Indian pantheistic philosophy. Later, at the end of the nineteenth century, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Khan (1839-1908) launched another such movement; in 1879 he started to proclaim a teaching intended to bring Islam closer to the rest of the world, mainly Christianity.

Just as the revivalist movements mentioned originated directly or at least indirectly under the influence of ideas adopted from the West, so modern Bengali literature was nourished by the encounter and balance of two different civilizations, indigenous and European; this is all the more significant for Indian literature, because Bengal takes a leading place in Indian literary life. Geographically, Bengal is protected to the north by the mighty shield of the Himalayas, whereas to the south it is open to the sea, and its geographical position presents as it were a picture of the literary life of modern Bengal, it rests on a firm foundation, the old indigenous literature, but is open to European influences coming from across the seas.

Bengali (*bāṅglā bhāṣā*) is a language extremely rich in expression, very melodious, which offers a plentiful variety of styles. It originated as a separate language, before 1000 B C, from a Middle-Indian language-form, Magadhi, which was in about the same relation to Sanskrit as Old Italian is to Latin. One of the main distinctions between Middle-Indian and Modern Indian

languages on the one hand and Sanskrit on the other is the process of assimilation and simplification of consonant-groups and the omission of consonants between vowels: Sanskrit *hastī* = elephant, Magadhī *hatthī*, Bengali *hātī*; Sanskrit *karma* = deed, Magadhī *kamma*, Bengali *kām*, Sanskrit *vadhuh* = woman, Magadhī *vahu*, Bengali *bau*.

At the end of the eighteenth century the language, after undergoing a number of changes, such as the mutation of the *a* to *e*, became stabilized.

Naturally, when Mohammedan rulers assumed power in Bengal, their language influenced the tongue of the subject races, which consequently assimilated a number of Persian and Arabic expressions such as *kalam* (pen), *kāgaz* (paper), *jamī* (land). Bengali also contains a few Portuguese elements, for as early as in the sixteenth century the Portuguese were in busy trade relations with Bengal. When, afterwards, the British took over the government of the country, and in particular, later, advanced schools on the Western pattern were established, some English expressions, too, found their way into the language (*iskul*, school, *gabharnar*, governor; *rel*, rail, etc.) But the old literary language, viz Sanskrit, remained an inexhaustible source of new expressions; writers in the new Indian speech, particularly in the early stages of the development of the language, always drew from it substantially. Some periods and some writers were even too much addicted to this.

Bengal has a rich store of ancient poetry, which although it originated at a time when foreign Mohammedan rule weighed heavily on the country, did not

Intellectual and Literary Tendencies

succumb to Mohammedan influence, for it originated among the people. Its content is almost exclusively religious. It echoes a genuine love for God, ~~as~~, for example, in the case of Chaitanya (1486-1534) who struggled against the prosaic intellectualism and mechanical ritualism of the orthodox Brahmīns. From an inspired divine love he arrives at a love of all mankind. With Chaitanya starts the fervent lyricism of Baishnabism. Baishnabism (derived from the Sanskrit name for the god Viṣṇu) is an Indian faith in a single personal god who is able to become flesh in this world; by devoted love for him and by his grace, man achieves salvation. In this respect Baishnabism strongly resembles Christianity. The Baishnabas worship this divine unity in the human love between Kṛṣṇa and his beloved, Rādhā. The influence of the love of the "Supreme ~~Lover~~" is felt in the different types of love for a ~~lover~~, a friend, a child, even for an animal and the whole of nature. It is a peculiarity of this poetry that its essential element is melody. It is not easy to understand the message of these chants, which seem to summon one to enter the kingdom of vast love and of the only truth. For their language is veiled by a cloak of mysticism, and they are full of dialect expressions from the Mithila country, which is supposed to have been the scene of Kṛṣṇa's life on earth.

In Bengal there have also been preserved popular national dramatic plays called *jātrā*, whose origins evidently lie in the very remote past. The word *jātrā* means procession, and the *jātrās* were evidently in origin a sort of procession in honour of divinity. The origins

Intellectual and Literary Tendencies

of the ancient Indian drama may perhaps be sought in such religious processions.

The Bengali *jātrās* show well-known scenes from the national epics, mainly from the life of Krishna. As a rule they take place in the open air. Carpets are spread, and the audience take their seats, protected from the sun by a canvas roof and hangings. The stage is in the centre. The actors dress themselves either behind the hangings, in a sort of dressing-room, or in full view of the audience. Frequently an actor who dies in the play gets up, changes his costume and plays another part. Sometimes these performances take place in the house of a rich man or in a special theatre, usually the property of a rich *zamīndār*. Female parts are played by men. The play must have a happy ending. The performances sometimes last a very long time. They start with the music of a primitive orchestra, which is regularly followed by a prologue (*prastābanā*), accompanied by an invocation of the divinity under whose protection the performance is held. The play is composed of dialogue between the characters, with lyrical songs inserted. This lyrical part frequently constitutes the greater part of the play, for the actors intone songs whenever an opportunity for emotion is offered. A peculiarity of the Bengal *jātrā* are two pairs of boys costumed either as shepherds or girls, who sing songs giving lyrical expression to the feelings which it is intended that the audience shall feel. This *judi* is therefore reminiscent of a Greek chorus. This evocation of emotional excitement in the audience is the main purpose of the *jātrā* and also the explanation of their popularity with the

Intellectual and Literary Tendencies

Bengali audiences, who are brought up in Krishna's religious cult and its love lyrics. From village to village travel the actors with their leader, who frequently becomes celebrated as a good servant of his god, and their arrival in a village is usually a holiday. These plays used to be so popular in Bengal that modern *jātrā* were composed on the old patterns, with affiliated elements such as *kīrtan* (a sort of melodrama in which the actors sing and dance to a musical accompaniment of drums and cymbals) these *jātrās* were for a long time Bengal's only dramatic creations. The *jātrās* all deal with the past, and as modern Bengali drama has to a considerable extent been based on these *jātrās*, Bengali drama originally stood aloof from the problems of the present, and was essentially antiquated in character.

Not until the beginning of the nineteenth century was there any development in Bengali prose. The prose written before 1800 consists only of fragments, and in addition this old prose does not differ much from verse. The stimulus for the development of modern Bengali prose came mainly from the efforts of European missionaries to place a translation of the Bible and other Christian literature in the hands of the Indians, written in a language which the masses would really understand.

The greatest services to this end were rendered by the English missionary William Carey (1761-1834) who founded a Bengali press in Serampore in 1800, and also by the staff of Fort William College, Calcutta. Carey himself wrote in Bengali, but his works are of no real literary value. The great mistake made by Europeans was that they wrote the language of their native teachers

Intellectual and Literary Tendencies

(the so-called *munshīs*) which was always very artificial. Even Carey knew, however, that Bengali is a language extraordinarily rich in fine distinctions of meaning, which can be learned only by long contact with people who are familiar with the true spirit and charms of this language. Neglect of these lingual finesses offends the ear and feelings of the indigenous population. Carey said prophetically that if Bengali were to be properly cultivated, there would be no language to surpass it for beauty and clarity. It is interesting that Carey himself really was interested in the development of the language, not merely in the religious education and betterment of the people. The father of modern Bengali prose is, however, Ísvarchandra Bidyasagar (1820-91). The language of Bengali thinkers was still Sanskrit, and Bidyasagar derived very much in his scientific treatises from this source. The first to free himself from this influence was Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya (in English Chatterjee, 1838-94), the first great modern Bengali writer. His language is described as "the sweetest voice that ever spoke in prose"; his works afford a typical example of the delicate instrument which Bengali can become in the hands of a literary artist.

In literature, as in religion, the best writers, like, for example, Rabindranath Tagore, did not avoid European influence, knowing that some time they will be able to repay their temporary debt to the West in the same coin.

Chapter Two

YOUTH

RABINDRANATH TAGORE, the youngest of the seven sons of Debendranath Tagore and the first Indian author to gain world fame, perhaps the noblest poet in the world to-day, was born in Calcutta on May 6, 1861, at a clear turning-point in the history of that time.

The poet's family belong to the Śāṇḍilya gotra of the Rādhiya Brahmin branch, family tradition narrates that it settled in Western Bengal in the eighth century A.D. In the seventeenth century it was in the service of the Mohammedan government, and obtained the attribute "*Thākur*" (approximately equal to the French "*Seigneur*") which in the English transcription was first rendered Tagoure and afterwards Tagore. In his mother tongue, Bengali, the poet's name is only Rabīndranāth Thākur. *Rabīndra-nāth* means literally "lord of the sun." The fact that his father was a leader of the Brahmasamaj determined the direction of his education. At the time when he was already a recognized literary character, Tagore recounted his memories of the days of his youth and growth in a sincere autobiography entitled *Jīban-smṛiti* (published in English under the title *My Reminiscences*). The author warned his readers not to misuse

this book by treating it as biographical material. He says it is only "pictures in the light of the passing day, before turning into the evening resthouse, of cities, fields, rivers and hills which we have been through in Life's morning." But nevertheless they are very valuable for an analysis of the poet's mentality at the beginning of his literary development.

Although the Tagores were a rich family, they enjoyed no exaggerated luxury. Moreover, life was then much simpler than it is to-day. Tagore's father, Debendranath, was frequently absent on journeys, his mother was afflicted by a protracted lung ailment. In childhood, maternal caresses are a matter of course and obtainable without asking. On the contrary the growing child tries rather to escape the bonds of maternal watchfulness, but if fate deprives a child of motherly care it is miserable indeed. Tagore complains that fate often played this cruel part in his own childhood. His most frequent guest, however, was loneliness. Young Tagore's world was bounded by the walls of the vast palace of Jorasanko in Calcutta, the servants, unrestrained, lightened the task of watching over the children entrusted to them by restricting their freedom of movement. Tagore himself tells that the manservant to whose care he was entrusted used every day to draw a chalk circle whose boundary he was not allowed to cross. The great world beyond the walls, too, was out of his reach. These early years, therefore, increased the boy's innate bashfulness, and he devoted his time to observation of his limited sphere. This included above all a tank with a flight of masonry steps leading down into the water, a lonely

tree on its western bank and a row of coco-nut palms to the south. The little boy knew when people came to bathe in it, and says that he liked watching them. One would not venture to immerse himself, and would merely wring out a towel over his head; another, with abrupt motions, carefully removed the rubbish and dirt from the surface of the water and then ploughed it with violent strokes, when he suddenly plunged into it; a third again jumped into the water from the highest step, whereas others entered the water slowly, repeating the obligatory morning prayers; some hurried home, but one of the regular visitors always had plenty of time, dried himself carefully and attired himself punctiliously in a robe which he had just washed, meticulously smoothing out the folds of his dhuti, and finished the process, radiant with satisfaction, by picking some flowers in the outer garden, to which the women of the numerous family had no access, being restricted to walks in the part adjoining the palace

But the lofty halls of the vast palace were also closed by tenfold locks, as he himself recounts in his *Reminiscences* (Macmillan & Co., London)

"In the days when the inner apartments were as yet far away from me, they were the elysium of my imagination. The zenana, which from an outside view is a place of confinement, for me was the abode of all freedom. Neither school nor Pandit were there; nor, it seemed to me, did anybody have to do what they did not want to. Its secluded leisure had something mysterious about it; one played about, or did as one liked, and had not to

render an account of one's doings. Specially so with my youngest sister to whom, though she attended Nilkamal Pandit's class with us, it appeared to make no difference in his behaviour whether she did her lessons well or ill. Then again, while, by ten o'clock, we had to hurry through our breakfast and be ready for school, she, with her plait dangling behind, walked unconcernedly away, withinwards, tantalizing us to distraction.

"And when the new bride, adorned with her necklace of gold, came into our house, the mystery of the inner apartments deepened. She who came from outside, and yet became one of us, who was unknown and yet our own, attracted me strangely, with her I burned to make friends. But if by much contriving I managed to draw near, my youngest sister would hustle me off with: 'What d'you boys want here? Get away outside.' The insult, added to the disappointment, cut me to the quick. Through the glass doors of their cabinets one could catch glimpses of all manner of curious playthings—creations of porcelain and glass—gorgeous in colouring and ornamentation. We were not deemed worthy even to touch them, much less could we muster up courage to ask for any to play with. Nevertheless these rare and wonderful objects, as they were to us boys, served to tinge with an additional attraction the lure of the inner apartments."

In addition to compulsory instruction at school the boy also took private lessons at home; even then, his literary gift was noticeable. The clerks of his father's estates gave him a small notebook, in which in a childish hand he wrote verses, in imitation of his school reader.

Once the headmaster of the school called him and gave him the task of writing a poem on some moral saying. When, next day, he brought his verses, the headmaster took him to the senior class and told him to recite them. He says that the general conviction was that the verses had been copied from somewhere

School was no place of pleasure for him. From the elementary school he was transferred to a Eurasian school, which also in no way attracted his wide-awake, solitary spirit. There was nothing to make it cheerful, neither pictures nor decorations of any sort, nothing capable of attracting a receptive and sensitive mind. He admits that he neglected it. "It kept me strictly separate from all that filled my life, and I felt as unhappy there as a rabbit confined in a biological institute."

In the year 1873, with two brothers, he celebrated his *upanayana*, the bestowal of the sacred thread, according to the ancient Brahmin custom, to the accompaniment of sacred chants chosen by his own father, who for this occasion returned for a few days to his home. Their heads shaven, the boys were left three days in religious meditation. The ceremony itself did not make so much impression on Rabindranath's young mind as the necessity of reciting the sacred *gāyatrī* ("tat Savitur varenyam bhargo devasya dhīmahi, dhiyo yo nah prachodayāt," i.e. "let us accept this magnificent light from the god Savitar, and may he stimulate our thoughts," *Rigveda*, III. 62, 10) and still more the task of pondering over its mystical significance. The rhythmical repetition of the verses of the *gāyatrī* appealed strongly to his sense of rhythm. The poet himself, in his *Reminiscences*,

reveals the extent to which this quality was already developed. He accompanied his father in a houseboat on the Ganges. Among his father's books he found *Gītagovinda*, Jayadeva's Sanskrit poem, written in the twelfth century A.D., printed in Bengali as if it had been prose, the verses not being marked out. Without understanding their meaning, he separated the verses and correctly discerned their beginning and end.

Yet in 1873 he was taken by his father for a long stay in the Himalayas. Before leaving for the forests of this "Refuge of the snows," they spent some time in Śāntiniketan, not far from Bolpur in Western Bengal, about 150 kilometres west of Calcutta. In this lonely spot Debendranath had laid out a garden, erected a house and sanctuary, in which he could invoke the only creator of all things. In this lonely spot, where the air was laden with the scent of flowers, which was given the fitting name of Śāntiniketan ("Place (*niketan*) of peace (*śānti*)") he read his favourite philosophers, indulged in profound meditation and gladly welcomed all who, far from all bustle and confusion, wished to spend a while in religious contemplation. The boy, allowed unlimited freedom in these unspoilt surroundings by his father, who thus prepared him for the time when he should no longer be under parental control, spent there the first really happy days of his youth, a sort of foretaste of the time when the wreath of fame was to crown his brow. The years 1873 and 1874, when the growing youth was much under the wise guidance of his father, were the most fertile period of his schooling for life. On the journey from Śāntiniketan to the Hima-

layas they stayed a time in Amritsar, the holy city of the Sikhs, who are strict monotheists. In their golden temple Debendranath often sat with his son among the faithful, listening to the hymns they sang and occasionally joining in the songs of praise with his melodious voice. His father's tolerance cannot have remained without influence on the formation of the youth's mind. After a journey through marvellously beautiful alpine valleys, the father and son settled down in a mountain hut. High above the human dwellings in the plains below, surrounded by age-old deodars lulled by the splash of the waterfalls, in the presence of the giants of the snows, the father guided his son by strict discipline to a love of truth, independence in life and appreciation of the marvels of Nature. With untiring perseverance Debendranath continued his son's interrupted schooling and himself instructed him in Bengali literature and history. In quiet communion under the stars he imparted to him the elements of astronomy. This sojourn amidst the naked grandeur of nature is more likely to have influenced his creative work, engraving itself deeply in his mind, than his later study of the French naturalists. How sensitive he was as a boy to the play of colours and light in Nature is revealed by the poet in a book written in his old age, *The Religion of Man* (1930). Nearly every morning, he says, he ran out from his bedchamber into the garden to greet the first pink flush of dawn, to drink in the sight of the dewy banks of flowers fanned by the morning breeze, and listen to the quiet of the early morning flooded by increasing daylight.

After a stay of some months in the Himalayas his

father sent Rabindranath back to Calcutta. It is no wonder that the school forms seemed harder to him than ever. The remonstrances of his elder brothers were in vain; so they gave up remonstrating with him and left him to his literary inclinations and his first literary flights. It was at this time that he first took independent notice of Bengali literature. He liked reading an illustrated monthly from his brother's library, *Bibidhārthasangraha*, published in 1851 and the following years by Rajendralal Mitra (1824-91). In particular, however, he was an ardent admirer of *Bangadarśan*, a monthly journal edited (from 1873) by the famous Bengali novelist Bankimchandra. In addition to scientific, philosophical and historical articles, *Bangadarśan* used to contain many literary debates and reviews. The mission of this journal was to bridge over the gap between the two types of educated Bengali—those educated in the Western way and the nationalists. He was most influenced by the lyrical songs of Bihari Lal Chakrabarti (1835-94), which were originally published in *Āryadarśan* and for that time were masterpieces. At this time he adopted Chakrabarti as his model for both manner and matter. Like him, he started using stanzas of twelve and eleven feet with an alternating rhyme.

Their palace was at that time the scene of intense literary activity. Artists and men of letters frequented their house, music was cultivated, and nearly all the members of the family wrote or at least actively supported literature. In Calcutta at that time there was a custom of holding friendly parties, the so-called *majlis*, which brought a pleasant change to the hospitable

house. Anyone who came to contribute to the pleasure of the others out of the rich store of his knowledge, or even only by cordial mirth, was always welcome. Recalling these *majlis* in his *Reminiscences*, Tagore regrets that this good old custom has died out. People still pay visits, he says, but the old desire for friendly conversation and social enjoyment no longer exists, a visitor comes only to arrange some transaction or discuss something else, as the haste of modern life demands.

Tagore was not yet thirteen, when, on March 8, 1874, his mother died. This wound, inflicted in youth, healed more easily than later blows, which cut more deeply and were long felt.

In 1876 a new monthly journal, entitled *Jñānāṅkur* ("Sprouting Knowledge"), was founded, and Rabindranath was asked to contribute to it. His first article was a review and analysis of a book entitled *Bhubanmohinīpratibhā* ("The Genius of Bhubanmohini"). Bhubanmohini is a woman's name, but the poems reveal so much manly vigour that Tagore in his analysis arrives at the conclusion that the author could not be a woman. A long poem by Tagore, entitled *Banaphul* ("Forest Flower"), was also published in the same year in the *Jñānāṅkur*. Next year Tagore's brother, Jyotirindranath, started publishing *Bhāratī*, a monthly journal, under the editorship of the eldest brother, Dvijendranath. Rabindranath was also one of the editors of this journal. He contributed a number of articles, reviews and poems. Of his work published in *Bhāratī*, an article entitled "The Hope and Despair of the Bengali" is characteristic of the development of his views. Even at this early

stage he speculated about the possibility of creating a new civilization by a synthesis of West and East. In *Bhāratī*, too, his long poem *Kabikāhinī* ("A Poet's Tale"), appeared; this work was his first independent published book (1878). It is a pathetic tale of a young poet who loves, abandons and once more seeks a young girl who, in the meantime, dies in hopeless despair. Speaking of these first efforts of his, Tagore says in his *Reminiscences*, "It was a period to which, if error was natural, so was the boyish faculty of hoping, believing and rejoicing. And if fuel of error was necessary for feeding the flame of enthusiasm, then, while that which was fit to be reduced to ashes will have become ash, the good work done by the flame will not have been in vain in my life." These first efforts were not included in any of the collected editions, just as the poet, when he published a selection of his early poems (*Śaiśab sangīt—Songs of Youth—1881*) omitted much of his earlier work.

In 1877 the first collection of poems, entitled *Bhānu-simher padāvalī*, appeared in *Bhāratī*, but it did not appear in book form until 1884.

The nascent poet revelled in the rich symbolism of Baishnaba lyrics, which were just being collected by Akshaychandra Sarkar and Saradacharan Mitra. He conceived the idea of imitating these lyrics and publishing these charming trifles as the work of the old Baishnaba poet Bhanusimha. In one of these songs Radha grieving over her restless love, laments

"O friend!

There are masses of cloud in the August sky, and the

night is deep and dark. O friend, how can I go on my way to the grove, helpless woman that I am? The Jamuna is lashed by the furious wind and the clouds are roaring still. The lightning flashes, and trees by the roadside fall; my body quivers. Rain falls fast from the masses of clouds *rim jhum, rim jhum, rim jhum*. The grove is thick, and dark with *śāla, pīyāla, tāla, tamāla* trees. Tell me, O friend, why does unkind Kṛṣṇa play in this storm in the grove on his terrible flute, calling the piteous name of Radha?

O friend!

Deck me with a circlet of pearls, and put on my forehead the *sīmthi*. Bind with a garland of *champaka* my hair, that hangs down on my bosom. Open the door quickly, my friend, leave all fear and shame, the heart-bird is struggling in the cage of my breast.

O woman, go not out into the deep night to an amorous young man. The clouds roar still, and many terrors would befall you. So says Bhanu, your servant."

The nom-de-plume is of course quite transparent, for Bhanusimha is a transcription of Rabindra. It was generally known by his friends that these poems were intentional imitations of Chandīdas and Bidyapati, old Baishnaba lyric poets, but the form and spirit of their imitation were so excellent that, when the poems were published in *Bhārati*, Nisikanta Chāṭtopadhyaya, who was at that time in Germany, deceived by intentional archaisms and failing to recognize the spirit of the songs, which after all was modern, wrote a learned treatise on the authorship of these poems, in which he demonstrated

that Bhanusimha is an ancient poet and that the poems could not have been written in the present time. But the imitations were neither parody nor a mere trick. They gave evidence of serious literary effort, for they showed not only appreciation of literary tradition, but also a desire for its revivification. Artistically, too, this attempt stands fairly high. Baishnaba lyricism's eager desire for divine love penetrated so deeply into the poet's mind that its influence is reflected in all his later work, and even overcame the influence of Byronic romanticism, by which, through Shelley, he was captivated as a young man.

At this time his father allowed his elder brother, Satyendranath, to take Rabindranath with him to England. His brother's family took up their dwelling in Brighton, and the poet lived with them. Thus, in the autumn of 1878, a new world was revealed to Rabindranath. The youth was not in any way oppressed by the strangeness of his new surroundings. His brother's wife gave him a mother's care, and he took part in her children's games. He attended school at Brighton. Everybody there was kind to the shy youth. The head master of the school—at that time scholastic circles in England were ardent students of phrenology—welcomed him with the friendly words: "What a splendid head you have!" as though he already suspected that it was the head of a genius. Often he was surprised by finding fruit in his pocket and saw the giver running away without a word.

But it was necessary to fulfil the task for which he was sent to England. He had to prepare himself for the

study of law. He therefore did not stay long at the school in Brighton. On the advice of Tarak Palit, a friend of Satyendranath, he was sent to London. Tagore has no pleasant memories of his stay in London. He took private lessons in Latin, and attended lectures at University College. His stay in England had considerable influence on him, particularly by bringing him powerful stimulus. He studied the great masters of English literature, Shakespeare, Milton, Byron. The greatness of the one and stormy character of the other impressed themselves upon his young mind. That was just what he missed among the surroundings of his youth. But another lack became more and more clear to him. The classic and modern literature of foreign countries other than England was at that time—and to a considerable extent is still—unknown in India, for almost the only foreign world known to the educated Indian is England. The young enthusiast tried to make this good by articles on Goethe, Dante, Petrarch, and Tasso, which he published in the *Bhāratī*. Translations from Victor Hugo, Shelley, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Tennyson and others led the boy's inventive spirit to imitations of European verse and later caused him to abandon the traditional Indian metre and to invent new metres. As he had musical leanings, he studied European music and European song in addition to literature.

In 1879 and 1880 he wrote impressions of his European journey for the *Bhāratī*, mainly criticizing English society; this was the origin of his *Yuropprabāsīr patra* ("Letters of a Pilgrim through Europe"). In his *Reminiscences* he says "In an unlucky moment I began to write letters

about my journey to my relatives and to the *Bhāratī*. Now it is beyond my power to call them back. These were nothing but the outcome of youthful bravado. At that age the mind refuses to admit that its greatest pride is in its power to understand, to accept, to respect; and that modesty is the best means of enlarging its domain " (Macmillan & Co., London)

Reciters of old tales and ballads, the so-called *kathaks*, often in the course of their narration (*kathā*) recount passages of emotional tension in song. In imitation of this Rabindranath wrote three musical playlets: *Bhagnahrīday* ("The Broken Heart"), *Bālmikīpratibhā* ("The Genius of Bālmikī") and *Kālmṛgayā* ("The Fateful Hunt"). In all the young beginner's attempts it can be noticed that even then he attached considerable importance to a musical accompaniment, by means of which he wished to stir the emotions whenever the emotion content of the words was not sufficient. It is remarkable that the melodies underlying his songs betray the influence of Western music.

Returning to India, he stayed for a time with his brother Jyotirindranath in a house on the bank of the Ganges, at Chandarnagar. How glad the poet was to hear once more the plaintive murmur of the Mother of Rivers. On its banks, under the intensely blue Indian sky, contrasting so sharply with the rich green of the vegetation, flooded in sun, forgetful of foggy days in England, he started to write with an exuberant flow of poetical inspiration his *Sandhyāsaṅgīt* ("Evening Songs"). The images of the "Evening Songs" and their dreamy dissatisfaction are reminiscent of Shelley. And indeed

at this time Rabindranath was called by his friends "the Bengali Shelley," just as another Bengali author was called "the Bengali Byron" and a third "Emerson." At this time it was the habit in Calcutta literary circles to give the names of Western masters to the writers whose works were reminiscent of them. Shelley's influence went very deep, deeper than Rabindranath himself realized, with Tagore, too, we find a parallel to Shelley's religious development. The poet submerges himself in his own being, into the depths of his restless and hungry spirit, and expresses the longings of his youthfully impressive heart in song. In his poems, however, he was able to subdue the chords which might have given a melancholy tone. At this stage the main motive of his *Evening Songs* was not yet woman, as in the succeeding period of his poetical development. The centre round which his inspirations circle, are the phenomena of this world. The south wind is his beloved guest, the murmur of water brings him new ideas, the flood of morning light is a messenger of joy, night weeps tears of dew for him and the whole world vibrates in harmony with his steps like the strings of a harp. And the same words are repeated relatively frequently, this limited vocabulary showing how vividly the same pictures are continually foremost in the poet's mind. In the poem *Gān ārambha* ("The Beginning of Song") he apostrophizes poetry, his beloved.

"As the light comes very slowly, with a gentle smile, to die on the funeral pyre in the flaming glow of the East, as the breeze storms in the grove, a guest from distant lands with tired wings, dying with a caress by

the flower to which it had plighted itself, so, just so, come, song, my bride, with tenderness on your tired lips and tears in your eyes!"

The exuberance and effusiveness of these twenty-two poems make it appear as if the struggle between his inner world and the outer world took place in the youthful flight of his creative powers. His *Evening Songs* are not only a manifestation of youthful directness, but also the record of his poetical struggle. He fervently desires to free himself from the bonds of the examples from which he formerly derived his ideas and technique, and boldly seeks—and finds—a path to freer metrical construction. At first he adhered to old patterns and was particularly fond of stanzas of four verses (twelve and eleven-foot lines) with an alternating rhyme, or fourteen-syllable elastic verse, the so-called *payār*, which can be shortened or lengthened at will. In Tagore's opinion the essence of Bengali verse is not the regular alternation of short and long syllables, as is the case in the classical languages, nor an alternation of accentuated and unaccentuated syllables (as in modern European languages), but regular grouping of feet of different value. The verse of nine sound units (we would call it a nine-syllable verse) can have the following construction. 3 + 3 + 3 (*āndhāra rajanī pohāla*) or 3 + 2 + 4 (*āsana. dile. anāhūte*) or 4 + 3 + 2 (*balechhinu basite. kāchhe*) or 3 + 6 (*bijulī: kothā hate ele*) or 4 + 5 (*mora bane ogo garabī*) or 4 + 4 + 1 (*bāre bāre: iāya chali. yā*) or 6 + 3 (*setārera tāre: dhānāśī*) or finally 5 + 4 (*ālo ela je. dvāre taba*). In later years Tagore wrote some (partly polemical) articles on Bengali prosody,

which were collected with the title *Chhanda* ("Prosody") in 1936. In *Evening Songs* his verse is already full of independent variations. *Evening Songs* announce beyond all doubt the birth of a poet, and established Tagore's reputation as a poet. That they were indeed a literary event we suspect from his *Reminiscences*, the poet tells how the great Bankimchandra was invited to the wedding of Rameshchandra Datta's eldest daughter. On entering the house in which the wedding was celebrated, he received from the hands of his host the traditional wreath of flowers. Seeing Rabindranath approach, however, he placed the wreath around the neck of the youthful poet with the words: "The wreath to him, Ramesh, have you not read his *Evening Songs*?"

On the advice of his friends, Rabindranath's father decided to send the boy, who was intoxicated by his first literary successes, to England again, to finish his study of Law. Rabindranath, therefore, embarked in Calcutta in 1884, together with a relation, who, however, was so affected by sea-sickness that he had to leave the ship at Madras. Rabindranath went back home with him. His prudent father seems to have seen in the interruption of the voyage the work of destiny, making it manifest that a legal career was not the walk of life for which his youngest son was predestined.

Shortly before his departure, Rabindranath, who has remarkable musical gifts, held a public lecture on music in Calcutta, in which he proved that music is given the task of expressing what words cannot say, and that it is better able to render things which words try in vain to convey. There is a fundamental difference between

Indian and European music. We attach importance to the faultless execution of the melody in the form in which it was written, in India the artist is given the possibility of improvising as he likes within the framework of the original composition. More, it is just this which shows his artistry and greatness. In Europe the main thing is the melodiousness of the voice, in India the essence of the melody. In India the music-loving public goes to hear song, in Europe the singer. In the seventeenth and eighteenth century there were two concurrent types of Indian music: national, and court music. The national music was permeated by the odour of the soil, and in it as much attention was paid to the words as to the music. Its character sprang from the heart of itinerant musicians. Court music was cultivated at the courts of Mohammedan princes, mainly by Mohammedan artists. It was a "learned" music, influenced mainly by Persian music. When its sources of inspiration ran dry, it derived fresh vigour from the wells of indigenous music.

When British rule in India became firmly established, the court life of the princes fell into a decline. A new aristocracy of foreign traders sprang up, which had no love for old art, as it had itself no old-established tradition. In this way the art of music degenerated, this was particularly evident in Bengal, where the power of the East India Company was first firmly established. The only guardians of old art were a few noble families, among whom the Tagores should be included. Rajah Sourindramohan Tagore strove for a revival of indigenous classical music; of Rabindranath's brothers, Jyotirindra-

nath, in particular, was an ardent lover of music. So Rabindranath's love of music is hereditary. Tagore's musical talent was one of the things which decided the character of his poetry, for many of his poems were originally musical inspirations, tone waves; the words are, therefore, inseparably bound up with the melody, which Rabindranath himself composes. The melody adds richness to the words and complements their emotional content, all the more so because Indian music allots a different key to every time of the year and day. "Our melodies give voice to the star-spangled night, to the first reddening of dawn. They speak of the sky-pervading sorrow which lowers in the darkness of clouds, the speechless, deep intoxication of the forest-roaming spring," the poet says in his *Reminiscences*. With Tagore, the melody is frequently born with the subject, and only afterwards is the whole composition clad in a mantle of words. In Europe, Rabindranath was particularly captivated by the melodies of old Irish songs. Tagore started to publish his first novel, *Bauthākurānīr hāt* ("The Bride-Queen's Market"), in *Bhāratī* in 1881; this was not published in book form until three years later, in 1884. His first long prose work *Karunā* ("Compassion"), which appeared in the first volume of *Bhāratī* in instalments, was unfortunately never finished.

Bauthākurānīr hāt is a description of the snares and intrigues at the royal court of Jaśohara, which is divided into two camps. King Pratapaditya, a hard and brutal ruler, is dissatisfied with his eldest son, Udayaditya, the successor to the throne, on account of his love for his subjects, fearing his excessive popularity with the people.

This antagonism provides the story, in which members of the neighbouring princely courts also play a part. Udayaditya's wife, the noble princess Surama, supports her rather weak husband, while Rukmini, a girl of low birth, whom Udayaditya had formerly loved, becomes a willing instrument in all the intrigues against Prince Udayaditya. His sister Bibha, however, is completely devoted to him, she is married to Prince Ramchandra, who is not much respected by his father-in-law, Pratapaditya, as the latter considers his family inferior to his own. The greatest conflict, however, is between Pratapaditya and his relative, Prince Basantaraya, whom Pratapaditya reproaches with having recognized the supremacy of the Great Mogul, and whose life he for this reason attempts. Udayaditya learns of the dark plans of his father and warns Basantaraya. Bibha's husband, Prince Ramchandra, is not a prudent man. His jester committed the stupid action of stealing into the women's apartments in disguise. With the help of Udayaditya he is able to escape the anger of Pratapaditya. This makes the old king angrier than ever with Udayaditya and those whom he suspects of having an evil influence on him. He commands that Princess Surama must leave the kingdom and return to her native country. But the day before she has to leave, Princess Surama dies. It is clear that she has been poisoned by Rukmini, who has taken revenge on her for enticing away Udayaditya's love. Messengers from Ramchandra ask for Bibha to be sent to Chandradvipa to her royal husband. Bibha, however, although she is at first willing to comply with Ramchandra's wish, hesitates to do so, fearing to leave

Udayaditya, especially after the death of Surama; this arouses the anger of Ramchandra. He writes an angry letter to Jaśohara, that he will take another wife, but the queen withholds the letter. Rukmini succeeds by a ruse in obtaining possession of Prince Udayaditya's signet ring, and seals a counterfeit message from Udayaditya to the Great Mogul at Delhi, to the effect that Pratapaditya's subjects are discontented with him, and asking for the father to be deposed and for the son to be crowned in his place. Rukmini then takes care that Pratapaditya has the messenger detained. The king puts his son into prison, and not even the persuasions of Basantaraya are sufficient to induce him to set his son free. With the help of the people, therefore, the prison is set on fire, and in the confusion the prince, with Basantaraya's aid, escapes. The people spread the report that he has been burnt to death, but Rukmini sees the prince escape and sends news to Pratapaditya, who sends soldiers to take the prince prisoner and bring him to Jaśohara. Brought before his royal father, the prince declares that he renounces his right to the succession and is going to lead a religious life in Benares. Bibha joins him, wishing to return to her husband. But when they arrive at the town where he has his seat, they see that it is full of rejoicing, for the prince is celebrating a new wedding. When Bibha comes before her husband, Ramchandra says that he does not know her. Offended in her pride, Bibha leaves with her brother for the holy city of Benares, and the *ghāt*, to which Bibha's boat makes fast, is still called the young queen's *hāt* (market).

The theme is taken from court life at the courts of

the Mogul emperors family disputes were frequent, and particularly in the periods when a change in the ruler was expected not only did brother oppose brother, but a son even was against his father. The ending, too, is in harmony with the Indian conception of eternal life. The Indian reader, for whom life on earth is not finished by this life and for whom there are sequels in future lives, seeing Udayaditya depart with Bibha to Benares, considers this a satisfactory solution of the conflict, but the European reader expects a sequel in which the various characters would pass through purifying fire and the conflict be solved in such a way that the good gain the upper hand and the evil be overcome. But even so it seems that the description of a historical conflict is intended as a means of finding out the purpose of the forces which determine the course of life to-day. Some characters, like, for example, Pratapaditya or Rukmini, emerged from the writer's workshop with expressive, sharp outlines. From a literary angle the construction and style of this novel of the poet's early years is reminiscent of the great story-teller Bankimchandra, and is very different from the longer novels of his later years. A short passage is sufficient to demonstrate this.

"The night was already far advanced. It was summer. The wind ceased. Not a leaf quivered on the trees. Prince Udayaditya of Jaśohara, Pratapaditya's eldest son, was sitting at the window of his bedchamber. By his side was his wife Surama.

"Surama said: 'Beloved, persevere and be patient. One day, the day of happiness will come.'

"Udayaditya said: 'I no longer ask for happiness. I wish

I had not been born in a royal palace, and were not the successor to the throne; I wish I were the servant of the most insignificant subject of the prince of Jaśohara, and not the only heir of his throne, of all his property, honours, glory, dignity and greatness! What would I give if all that could be changed!"

"Surama, deeply grieved, took his right hand between both of hers and pressed it. Gazing into his face, she sighed long and deeply. She would willingly have sacrificed her life, if this would have brought fulfilment of the prince's wishes, but, alas, the prince's wish could not be fulfilled, even if she gave up her life.

"The prince said 'Surama, it is because I was born in a royal palace that I have been unable to find happiness.' "

The sequel to the *Evening Songs* are the *Morning Songs* ("Prabhātsangī"). Their structure, however, is firmer, and they show that the poet's attitude towards the world is profounder. They are the message of a spirit that is virilely conscious of its place in the world, which he loves boundlessly and of which he gives his readers Wordsworthian glimpses. The poet evidently, in his twenties, passed through a crisis from whose "darkness without sun, without moon, without stars, he emerged on the sea-shore of joy, heard the sound of singing and smelled the scent of flowers; all of a sudden his soul opened." He recognizes that the world is beautiful in its magnificence, and full of light. He does not touch the chord of asceticism, harped on so frequently and so long in India, and especially in Bengal. His heart became full of life's optimism, and remained true to it his whole life long. It was on the day of this recognition that he wrote

the poem entitled *The Awakening of the Waterfall*. The waterfall, whose spirit sleeps confined in frozen isolation and is awakened by the sun's rays to become a mighty, unhampered river, which finds its mission in eternal self-sacrifice, is compared with the spirit of a poet, which is awakened to service of the world and to love of mankind. Referring to this period of his life, Tagore wrote later "I know not how of a sudden my heart flung open its doors, and let the crowd of worlds rush in, greeting each other." Whereas in the *Evening Songs* the poet seems to have been reserved and reticent, in *Morning Songs* it is as if he had come out of himself, or had by some magic power lifted the veil between himself and the rest of the world. One of the last poems (cf. *Jibansmriti*, page 173) of the *Morning Songs* was *Echo*. At that time his brother was visiting Darjeeling, the pearl of the Himalayan slopes. Rabindranath was with him. Looking at the snowy peaks of the mountain giants, he used to sit close to the brink of a gorge and listen to the waterfalls. A sort of longing for something which is the essence of our love welled up in the poet's heart. We cannot surely love a thing itself, once we have gained the experience that one and the same thing is at one time a matter of indifference to us or even repulsive, but at another time is the object of our desire. We therefore long, not for the thing itself so much as for its effect on us, and the poet, finding no other words for this mysterious radiation, called it "echo" (*pratidhvanī*). "Thee, echo, I love more perhaps than anything else! Thou makest me confused and agitated, to thee is borne the wailing of my flute! Thee I love, hearing birds' song

from thy lips, hearing the murmur of waterfalls, listening to the profoundly mysterious music of the grove and the song of the whole world! But why cannot I succeed in catching a glimpse of thee, though I seek thee everywhere?" From another passage of this poem we observe a Byronic desire to find an outlet for his suppressed energy "Oh, I cannot subdue the desire and ardour of my heart! The mountain trembles, stones fall in showers, and the foaming water swells and rages in tremendous anger. It longs to flow with mighty power, to burst through the mountain, to flow in the morning light and to rush through the centre of the world!" The flood of his exultation is clad, even in these early songs, in delightful phrases full of descriptive music.

This collection also contains a number of translations from Victor Hugo and a long passage from Shelley. The whole collection, although not yet dazzling, wins the reader by its poetical vigour.

At about that time his brother, Jyotirindranath, conceived the plan of founding a Bengali "Literary Academy" whose task it would be, on the French pattern, to watch over literature and the literary language and facilitate their development. In addition, the need was felt of making a survey of the use of modern technical expressions, directing the assimilation of foreign words and regulating the rendering of geographical names according to the pronunciation of these names in the countries in question. All this was to fall within the competence of this Bengali Literary Academy, which, however, did not assume definite form until 1894. The idea of founding a Bengali literary academy was propagated, not only

by Rabindranath, but also, very enthusiastically, by a well-known Sanskrit authority of the day, Rajendralal Mitra. It was regarded very sceptically, however, by the great scholar and humanist, Paṇḍit Bīdyasagar. When Rabindranath wished to gain his support for this idea, he answered amicably "My advice to you is to leave us out—you will not accomplish anything with bigwigs, they can never be got to agree with one another." Unfortunately his prophecy was fulfilled. Another "bigwig" to become a member was Bankim-chandra, but he did not take any part in the work.

In 1883 Tagore spent some time in Karwar, a beautiful spot on the south-west coast of India, where his brother Satyendranath was at that time a judge. Charmed by the riotous profusion of that marvellous country and under the influence of tradition—for we see from Indian literature of the earliest and intermediate period, and from Indian painting, that the Indians have always had a great love of nature—he wrote a dramatic poem entitled *Prakṛitir pratīśodh* ("Nature's Revenge"). An ascetic sannyasi, a sort of Indian Paracelsus, who wishes to conquer nature by suppressing all his natural longings and thus to achieve a correct knowledge of the infinite, convinces himself that it is his asceticism which is monotonous in comparison with genuine devoted love of this world, and abandons asceticism. A girl, a simple child of nature, shows him the truth—that it is only in the light of love that all limitations become absorbed in the infinite.

The work consists of a number of scenes rather than a coherent drama. The individual pictures are in sharp

contrast the villagers living in peace and simplicity in the heart of nature stand out in bold relief against the lofty philosophizing of the ascetic. But in the end it becomes evident that genuine love, dictated by nature, can bridge the gap between apparent simplicity and the seeming inflexibility of God. The contrast of the changing scenes betrays the influence of the author's study of the greatest English dramatist.

Nature's Revenge, and the *Morning Songs*, to which it is ideologically akin, show that the period of the poet's quest is over. *Nature's Revenge* is a conspicuous milestone of the development of his philosophy. The poet has found his sphere.

This period represents a milestone of another kind as well. On December 9, 1883, he married Mrinalinidebi

In 1884, on his return to Calcutta, his *Chhabi o gān* ("Pictures and Songs") was published, they are an echo of the music of the spheres reflected from the poet's heart. They are kaleidoscopic fragments of impressions, miniature observations about nature and man in it. Village scenes alternate with pictures of town life, the portrait of a self-denying ascetic with youth's dream of happiness and womanly beauty. The introductory poem, *Who*, in which, full of astonishment, he asks who it is that has entered the life of his agitated heart, is the song of a heart thirsty for love. In the expressive description entitled *Dream of Happiness* he paints with the touch of a master the emotions of a girl sitting at a window; the wind brushes her cheek, the rustling of the trees soothes her ear, and the falling blossoms, the birds flying and the play of the clouds astonishes her eye. How

realistically he can draw is shown by the poem entitled *The Lonely Woman*:

“A girl is walking through the rice-fields in the evening alone. All around grows the golden rice. The glow of the evening falls on her face and is glistening in her hair. Who knows of what she thinks, as she paces absent-mindedly on. The west seems all of gold, who ever saw so much gold anywhere? In the midst of all this, the unkempt woman seems to have been painted in by someone. Why does her face look like that, as if she had lost her way somewhere, as if she wanted to ask somebody something, but is full of fear to ask it? Her steps falter as she walks, she does not speak when questioned, she only looks at your face with large, troubled eyes. Her eyes are full of tears, as if they would shed them in a moment.”

From these *Pictures and Songs* the facility with which Tagore writes poetry is evident. He himself refers to this in *Chhinnapatra* (“Torn Letters,” p. 93)

“The short poems come of themselves, so that I cannot devote sufficient time to drama. If it were not for this, I could take in the ideas for two or three plays which at this time knocked at my doors. I regret that I have to wait until the cooler season. Except *Chitrāṅgadā*, all my plays were written during the winter. At this time the cold weather stems the flow of lyrical poetry and facilitates the writing of plays.”

At this time many of his contributions appeared in *Bālak*, a monthly journal for young people, which was founded in 1885 by his sister-in-law, who was of the opinion that Bengali youth needed such a journal. After

a year *Bālak* was amalgamated with *Bhāratī*. Tagore also wrote for the newspaper *Nabajīban* ("New Life"), published by Akshaychandra Sarkar. At that time Bankimchandra was publishing a monthly journal called *Prachār* ("The Preacher") the bulk of the contents of which consisted of Bankimchandra's historical, religious and social reflections. For this paper, too, Tagore wrote several poems and an appreciation of Baishnaba lyric poetry. At this time he was in close contact with this free-thinking Indian, whose rationalist philosophy, it is true, had no charms for him, but who impressed him by his freedom of thought, tolerance, realism and sincerity.

The British Viceroy at this time (1880-84) was Lord Ripon, who sincerely tried to see that the principles laid down in Queen Victoria's proclamation after the Indian Mutiny in 1857 were fulfilled. This mutiny did not arise, as might to-day very easily be thought, from national dissatisfaction. It was mainly a revolt of the Indian feudal lords against the economic order introduced by the new rulers, a revolt which the malcontents screened and artificially nourished by religious fanaticism. By a superhuman effort the revolt was suppressed. But it is strange that it was just after this revolt that Indian nationalism gradually came into being, just as there arose at the same time a feeling of mutual distrust which at first neither the English nor the Indians admitted. The British were afraid of a fresh revolt, the Indians felt that the spirit of the government of India was changing. The Indians remembered how a previous Viceroy, Bentinck, had declared in 1829 that the prime and most

important desire of his heart was the weal of the Indians, and that he knew nothing more important than the amelioration of their position and the improvement of the morale of the people. In the same spirit, in the eighties, Lord Ripon considered it just that Indian judges should be entitled to pass judgment on British law-breakers, who until then might not be tried by Indian courts. The European planters, who were not exactly scrupulous about the lives of their Indian labourers, were exasperated at this and prevented the adoption of Lord Ripon's proposals. The aggressiveness of this European exploitation was felt by an Englishman, Allan Octavian Hume. In an open letter written in 1883 to Calcutta University he summoned it to assist him in founding a society to work for the spiritual, moral, social and political regeneration of India. An Indian patriot, Surendranath Banerjee, wished to found a similar society. These two movements united and constituted the basis of the "All-India National Congress," which first met on December 27, 1885. Its first secretary was an Englishman, the A. O. Hume already mentioned. This institution wished to defend the just rights of the indigenous population against the superior rights of the Europeans, at the end of each year, at Christmas, it intended to lay down in discussions the guiding principles of Indian policy for the next year and to demonstrate that native India had capable and responsible politicians. The work of the "All-India National Congress" was therefore not originally directed against the British rule.

But the spirit of this institution soon started to change. It is as though the life of the higher classes of Bengal

was being remoulded. The spread of Western education increased Indian self-confidence, and foreign rule began to be felt as oppression and as a hindrance to the national development. Rabindranath Tagore wrote against "currying favour with the white lords," but was equally opposed to empty and thoughtless political agitation, sentimental patriotism and hazy cosmopolitanism. The educated classes became aware that they must give up their traditional unpractical dreaming. This period really did see the birth of a new sense of realism. Rabindranath's brother, Jyotirindranath, was busy with a plan for the foundation of a national Indian industry and trade. He wished to promote a steamship company. He purchased a steamer, gave it the name of *Svadeśī* and decided that it should ply between Barisal and Khulna. Most of the passengers were Bengali patriots; they were not only given a free passage but also were not charged anything for their food. The steamship service of course did not pay, but it was not stopped until the *Svadeśī* sank near Howrah bridge. In newspaper articles, Rabindranath emphasized the necessity of awakening confidence in the wider public, and of supporting the small indigenous cottage industries. At the same time, however, he stressed the necessity of cultivating the national tongue.

In 1883-87 Rabindranath published four volumes of critical reflections, literary studies and treatises on social questions (*Bibidha prasanga*, *Ālochanā*, *Samālochanā*, *Chithipatra*) in all of which his reformatory endeavours and sincere convictions are evident as well as the change that has in the meantime taken place within his heart. At that time Bengali youth listened to his voice. His

opinions, however, came into conflict with those of the great Bankimchandra, particularly after his lecture on Hindu marriage (in 1887), but the celebrated novelist replied to him in an indulgent letter. Tagore firmly believed that India cannot make any progress unless the social injustices are abolished. He tried to convince his compatriots that their love of freedom must be constructive, and that those who treat disdainfully their brothers and sisters, whom the unjust Indian caste system have made outcaste, cannot achieve a genuine and complete responsibility.

At this time Providence poured gall into the cup of his life: in 1885 his elder brother Jyotirindranath's wife died. The death of this woman, who was both a mother and a friend to him, made a deep impression upon his sensitive heart.

Chapter Three

MATURITY

THE young poet completed his twenty-fifth year. He was a handsome and at the same time virile figure: he was slim, of upright carriage, with expressive features, he was slightly bronzed, with a well-shaped mouth, kind, wise eyes and long, naturally wavy hair. He dressed carefully. He was a leading light of Calcutta literary society, particularly when, in 1887, he drew attention to himself with *Kari o komal* ("Sharps and Flats"), a rich collection of lyrics full of kaleidoscopic vitality; the realism of *Pictures and Songs* formed a transition to this work.

Sharps and Flats is a collection of poems which have a common fundamental basis of desire—which was so late in gaining its place in Bengali literature—to live genuinely and fully in this world. With this collection, which is full of deep feeling and poetic fire, and one of his best poetical works, the young man of twenty-five appeared before the public as a great poet. He matured unusually quickly. He effervesces with youthful daring in expression and idea. Like other great lyric poets, he draws on the eternal, magic source of lyricism—nature and love, but especially love. (A woman with the glow

Maturity

of the sky in her face and the flame of dawn in her heart is at this stage of his development a magnet to which his poetical vigour constantly returns with unquenchable hunger. The poet becomes an advocate of the pleasures of life. He has had enough of mere observation, now he wishes to experience pleasure himself. His poetry is full of the blood of life, it swells and swings like the waves of the sea. We feel how the poet's mind conceives an incessant flow of ideas, born of the joyous beauty of the world and full of its intoxicating sap, and we see how, as they mature, his ideas are conveyed in expressive words full of colour, which are willing servants in the poet's workshop.)

But he does not want merely to experience the pleasures of this world, he wants also to create pleasure; his optimism springs not from pleasure but from work, and thus it acquires a morally valuable content. Typical of the whole collection is the poem *Life*, which the poet placed at the beginning of the book:

“I do not want to die in this beautiful world,
I want to live amongst mankind.
In the sunlight, in this flowering garden,
In the midst of living hearts let me find a place.

On this earth the play of life is ever on the flow.
How much of separation and union and tearful
laughter there is—
Let me build an immortal home
By weaving songs of the joys and sorrows of men.

Maturity

If I cannot do that then let me so long as I live

Find a place in your midst,

{ Let me grow morning and evening flowers of new
songs

{ For you to pluck.

Take my flowers with a smiling face

And, alas, if they wither then throw them away."

The motives of the poems alternate with kaleidoscopic variety; often a man does not consider life on his bank of the river complete and summons the ferryman who is heading for the other bank to return and take him with him in his boat to the fullness of life which he longs for. . . . The goddess Durga cannot be satisfied if poverty prevents people from taking part in her festival. . . . In this world, worldly longings can be suppressed only by a life of perfect love and by the repudiation of ~~personal~~ selfishness, which a man is inclined to overstress if he is not conscious of divine proximity.

The collection also contains a number of poems in which the tones of erotic emotion are not subdued, but are expressed with a Heine-like sensual charm and Hellenic sincerity; this has brought him the censure of his contemporaries on the grounds of sensualism and voluptuousness, but only because this type of poetic realism was not known in Bengal. { In the poem *Breasts*, for example, he imagines how the love of a woman's heart budded on the surface of her body in the form of breasts, and that it is for this reason that their odour is so intoxicating for a lover. In them the sweet secret

Maturity

of love swells on the threshold of a woman's heart in time to its beating; at the call of love they came into the world, but they paused, shamefaced, before the veil of the woman's robe; they are the blossoming song of love and the secret temple of a woman's heart. In another poem, *The Kiss*, red lips lure him:

“The kiss is the language of the lips at their meetings, it is as if the hearts of both were drinking each other. Two loves, leaving their homes, have set out on a pilgrimage to the confluence of their lips. Two waves, emerging out of the depths of love, break and disappear on the two lips. Two eager desires long for each other, and the meeting of the two takes place at the gateway of the body. Love is writing a song in gentle characters, in letters of a multitude of kisses on the lips. It is as if someone were plucking flowers from two lips, in order, perhaps, to weave a garland on returning home. This sweet union of two pairs of lips is like the red bridal chamber of laughter.”

The book contains several fine poems about children, as well as some patriotic poems. In *The Summons*, for example, the poet asks whether the Indians have any lasting quality with which to contribute to the civilization of the world, and calls to his country to take up its right place in the harmonious concert of mankind. In *Patra* (“Letter”) he rejoices that he finds a safe harbour from the tumult of the world in the calm beauty of nature. But nature cannot of course replace his mate and in the midst of the autumnal exuberance of nature

his loneliness causes him to long for her. Translations from the Japanese and from European writers, Shelley, Victor Hugo, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, A. Webster, P. B. Marston, and poetical letters to friends conclude this unusually valuable collection.

The son remained true to the creed of his father. In 1887 Rabindranath became secretary of *Adibrāhmasamāj*, which function he held until 1911, and helped his dreamy father in his work of reformation. But he is no intolerant and narrow-minded sectarian. In an article on Rammohan Ray, the spiritual father of *Brāhmasamāj*, he emphasizes that the importance of a nation is determined by its contribution to the sum total of human culture, and that the true freedom, both of the individual and of the community, consists in the subordination of selfish interests to the great spirit of humanity.

As a true Bengali, he loved dramatic performances; this love is demonstrated, too, by the fact that he liked taking a part in his own dramas. On the instigation of his enthusiastic brother, Jyotirindranath, he soon started to write dramas. It should be remembered that in Calcutta there was for a long time no permanent theatre, although the Bengali public was very fond of dramatic performances. These were given under the aegis of some noble family, such as the Tagore family, and naturally not only was the number of those who could attend the performances limited, but also the choice depended on the will of such a protector. The Tagore family, in particular, seems to have been too exclusive and not sufficiently democratic. A group of enthusiasts conceived the idea of founding a permanent theatre in

Calcutta, independent of the caprices of aristocratic exclusiveness. A "National Theatre" was therefore founded in Calcutta, and on December 7, 1872, the first performance was held; it was *Nīl darpan*, a play written some time before, in 1858, by Dinabandhu Mitra (1829-73). The play is not outstanding, but because it describes the dramatic sufferings of villagers and the severity of English planters, and because its English rendering (by Michael Madhusudan Datta) was published and preceded by a preface by the Rev. Dr. James Long, who was for this offence sentenced to one month's imprisonment and a fine of Rs 1000, considerable interest was aroused and the success was extraordinary.

It was to be expected that such a success would give impetus to dramatic art, and indeed Rabindranath Tagore himself for a time hesitated whether he should not devote himself exclusively to drama, as he considered this form more eloquent than any other. His plays were at first only melodramatic songs, but later they consisted of dramatic conceptions of some myth or historical legend from the poet's personal angle, or witty pictures similar to the *jātrās*, or finally plays, which, in the form of dramatic performances, proclaimed his views of the world and humanity. Not until he reached an advanced age did he draw the material of his dramas from present-day life.

His *Māyār khelā* ("Play of Illusion"), written in 1888, is still a melodramatic song. The main feature is that of lyrical songs strung on a slight thread of plot, which was in 1884 given prose treatment in *Nalinī*. Nalinī secretly loves Nirad, who, however, has chosen Niraja for his wife. Niraja, learning of the love of Nalinī and Nirad,

Maturity

gives up her life to secure the happiness of her husband. The melancholy fame of the Bengali maidens' self-sacrificing spirit was at that time widespread in Bengal, so the solution is in harmony with the spirit of the time. Unfortunately Nirad's happiness is not bought by Niraja's death, for Nalinī refuses Nirad.

Rājā o rānī ("The King and the Queen"), written in 1889, is a long tragedy of the ruin of a royal family. A very much abbreviated English translation of the play appeared in 1917.

The dramatist shows the difference between the workings of conscientiousness in the mind of woman and man. King Bikramdeb does not pay much attention to affairs of state, and his heart is not touched by either the hunger or the privations of his people. But Queen Sumitra finds it hard that her husband is only a lover, and that it is her relations, foreigners, who impoverish the country and its people. She therefore wishes to save the kingdom herself, since the king is weak, although he says that his strength is shown by his great love for her. If this is true, then the queen would like him to hate her. When the news comes that the king's governors have revolted, and the king refuses to take the field against them, she says that she will herself head an expedition to suppress the revolt. Only now does the king become aware of his duty. He firmly puts down the revolution, but is willing to give mercy to the main initiator of the revolt, Prince Kumarsen, if he surrenders unconditionally. Kumarsen's uncle, Chandrasen, asks pardon for him. But Rebati, his wife, feels that the guilt must be expiated, for revolution is not merely a

private misdeed, but threatens the life of others as well; the lawbreaker must be punished. The third pair, Prince Kumarsen and Ila, daughter of Amaruraj, are the most attractive characters. It is Ila who, when her father sends her to the victorious Bikramdeb, as a proof of his loyalty and as the fairest greeting, begs of him as a favour not to accept her father's gift. Bikramdeb, she says, has everything. fantastic wealth and vast territories, and there is nothing left for him to desire. The king replies, however, that what he has not got is her heart. Ila betrays that her heart is no longer her property. It belongs, she says, to Kumarsen, king of Kashmir. When she learns that Kumarsen is being hunted to his death by the soldiers of his antagonist, and that he is worse off than the poorest beggar, she asks the king to help him. Is he not also a king? The girl's devotion overcomes Bikramdeb's selfishness, which had coveted the beautiful girl for himself. But Bikramdeb, after all, cannot hope for a dry branch to blossom with borrowed flowers. Let Ila, therefore, love him who is king of her splendid heart, with all her soul; he tells her to make ready for Kumarsen's arrival and himself promises to bring him to her. Bikramdeb is resolved to restore the throne to him, but Chandrasen knows that the proud prince will not accept it from his hand. Moreover, the nation itself will condemn him for his fault. And while Sumitra approaches with his head, herself dying, Ila attires herself in wedding robes, expecting to meet her lover. But her lover did not do his duty, and he has had to atone for this by death.

This drama is not without gaps and blemishes, although

it is full of emotion and dramatic incident. It does not contain enough psychological analysis. We do not quite understand what has induced the king, who says that he feels in himself "an uncontrollable force which he has converted into love for the queen," to harden his heart against her. The queen's death, too, is not sufficiently motivated, Prince Kumarsen, again, gives up his life almost too easily, although Ila's deep love should have made it of more value. The characters are too much the instruments of a higher power. The dramatist himself, however, was not satisfied with his treatment of the theme, and returned to it some years later in *Tapatī* (see p. 250).

In 1887 Rabindranath wrote another novel, *Rājārshi* ("The Saint-King"), which was later, in 1890, dramatized under the title *Bisarjan* ("Sacrifice"), for the poet clearly recognized the dramatic potentialities of the theme.

The problems which he desires to solve in his novel, and later in a five-act play, are many. First of all there is the dispute between the orthodox faith, which favours bloody sacrifices to the goddess Kali, and progress, which repudiates all blood-sacrifices. Can the goddess, then, regard with favour the sacrifice of a kid which has been taken away from a poor woman? This dispute is all the more delicate because it is between a woman and a man: Queen Guṇabati and King Gobind. Another dispute dealt with is that between divine and human law, between spiritual and secular power. The brotherly love between Gobind and his brother Nakshaktraray is also put to the test, the latter refusing to betray his brother. And finally the temple servant Jayasimha has to choose between the call of his duty in the temple and

moral and temporal law, which bids him to disobey Raghupati, who orders him to lift a murderous weapon against the king. Raghupati justifies this by a biased interpretation of the commands of the ancient writings, saying that it is no sin to kill, because incessant killing goes on in the world in defence of life. Jayasimha, who cannot understand that the goddess could bid a brother to slay his brother, and whose heart passes through the purifying fire of true love, promises in ambiguous words that before midnight royal blood will be shed, and prefers to sacrifice himself. Sorrow at his death, in the most affecting scene of the play, brings to Raghupati the knowledge that his way cannot be the true one. The goddess' old stone prison bursts, and she finds a new home in the heart of man.

Thus this drama, which deals with the moral foundations of human actions, has an elevating conclusion: the idea conquers, even though it is at the cost of a human life. This is undoubtedly one of the poet's best plays. The English translation of the drama, which appeared in 1917, bears a dedication to the authors who signed a manifestation for peace, "the heroes who valiantly stood up for peace when the goddess of war demanded human sacrifices."

At the end of the nineties the poet, who even at that time was very fond of solitude, paid a short visit to Ghazipur in the United Provinces. Here, among the rose-gardens, but still troubled by unrest and unfulfillable longings, he wrote most of the poems published under the title *Mānasī* ("The Heart's Desire"). They are the product of creative ecstasy, born of the abundant

Maturity

life-giving sap of the poet's unrest. His dynamic spirit, full of enthusiasm for greatness and vigour, is disappointed and disenchanted at the sight of pettiness and narrow-mindedness by the side of beauty and greatness. From this he draws the personal conclusion that he must devote himself entirely to the art of poetry. He sees a poet's place in the midst of the struggle for the regeneration of the nation and against obscurantism, hollow patriotism and pugnacious boasting. The book also contains poems of a decidedly embittered character. In the poem *Unruly Hope* he discloses that his heart is tortured by an obstinate thirst for space and by a longing to shake off the bonds of life. Not even India, he says, can live in a cage. "It were better if I were a Bedouin Under my feet would be the vast desert disappearing in the horizon, horses running, sands all flying, pouring the stream of life into the sky and burning a fire under my heart, I am journeying day and night. There is a spear in my hands and faith in my soul, and I have no destination."

Tagore concludes his powerful poem with the wish.

"Oh, could I escape somewhere,
How alive I would be!
Within the bounds of fettered life
No peace can I find."

That the poet felt physically and morally confined at this period of life is clear from the fact that he frequently returns to this idea in letters written at this time. In a letter written in 1894 we read: "I am so fond of light

and space! When Goethe was dying he asked for 'more light!' If I can voice any wishes at that time I shall say: 'More light and more space!' It is interesting that words like "light," "wind" and "space" occur frequently in his poems, but "mountains" relatively seldom (except for the traditional Himalayas) as if his mind instinctively avoided mountains as limiting the view.

Not even with regard to the form of his poems will he suffer himself to be restricted. his verse has freed itself from traditional bonds and is unusually varied, with a strong rhythmical effect.

In the poem *The Noon of Life* he says sadly.

"Life was easy in my youth,
I walked by my own strength;
In the new morning I began,
As if in sport, the long race of my life.
There was no heat in my tears, no ridicule in
my laughter,
And no malignant fire in my speech
My brow was promptly smoothed of the frown
of worry,
It was serene, illuminate with joy
The road started to wind, life became complex,
The burden of life increased "

Later, however, the poem reveals that the solace of hope cooled the irritation of burning dissatisfaction: "To-day I drink of the eternal stream of consolation which flows from the peace of nature."

His self-confidence gains the victory just as Dante

Maturity

greeted Virgil as his Master, so Tagore places himself at the side of Kalidas, the greatest poet of ancient India, and recognizes that he too has been given a place in the world (*Forsaken*)

“Standing on the spacious Earth,
I lost all fear and shame.
I realized that in this world
I too had a task to perform.
To the soil of my country I bowed
And said with folded hands
‘Accept, O Mother, this whole life,
Which I consecrate to Thee.’ ”

In addition to delightful love poems, which for depth of feeling and charm of form can well compete with the best love-lyrics of the world (cf. *Vain Love*), this work contains a poem *Sea-Waves*, which describes the destructive fury of a storm at sea. This motive is infrequent in Tagore's work. The theme of this poem was suggested by a wreck of a ship carrying eight hundred men and women who were on a pilgrimage to the sacred shrine at Puri, in the spring of 1887. The vigour of expression, the colourful and effective description and the harmony between the music of the poem and its action unquestionably betray the hand of a master. The expressive description of the fury of the elements, the whistle and roar of the wind might have been found by the poet in Byron's *Don Juan*, but Tagore strove for more than a mere description: at the end of his poem he shows that Nature contains compassion as well as

terrors, hope as well as despair, creation as well as destruction. The Preacher of the Faith, too, was inspired by an incident from actual life; the courage and irony of the description of the "valour" of the defenders of Hinduism who beat a Salvation Army preacher in Calcutta in 1888 are typical of Tagore. In this poem Tagore attacked with exemplary courage the cowardice of his fellow-believers, who boast of their bravery against a defenceless Christian, but flee before the police. At home these "heroes" maltreat their wives because the food is not ready.

Tagore wished to wander through India like the old pilgrims, to learn to know the life of the people, but his father decided that he should take charge of some estates in Shilaidah. Before taking up his work, however, he made a short journey to Europe. He visited Italy, France and England. His journey is described in articles originally published in the periodical *Sādhanā* (1891-93), entitled *Yuropyātrir dāyārī* ("Diary of a Traveller to Europe"). The young traveller observed not only countries, but also their culture, and wrote colourful pictures of his travels.

Much more important are the letters written at the time of his life in the country. He felt deeply the beauty of the countryside, and its changing scenery, which he describes with extraordinary freshness and vividness, but his heart went out, above all, to the country-people. As estate-manager he was a kind employer. It is remarkable how this born aristocrat understood the simple country-folk and their needs. He tried to help the poor, patient country-people, who loved their family above

Maturity

all things, both in their everyday worries and in the periodical visitations of the Bengali countryside, floods, poor harvests, and cholera. He was full of unceasing understanding for each of the little tasks performed by the diligent hands of the peasants. He was in favour of a high degree of economic self-sufficiency and co-operative enterprise, which was gaining ground in Bengal. He supported the local administration of the communities according to the old custom, and revived old crafts by organizing annual fairs to give the craftsmen the opportunity of selling their work. He wrote at that time: "I am very fond of the country-people—the peasants—those great, helpless, child-like sons of Providence. I do not know whether the socialist ideal of an equal distribution of wealth can be put into practice anywhere, but if it cannot, such a provision of Fate is really harsh and man is really an unhappy being, for if the misery of this world is inevitable, then there is no help for it; but let there remain at least some small loophole, at least some slight possibility, to compel the nobler part of mankind to hope and continually to struggle for an alleviation of this misery." In this idyll of rural life among peasants the writer himself matures and his personality becomes completely harmonious. There can be no finer document for his character than these simple but unusually significant words, contained in a letter written at that time: "The longer I live alone, within myself, on the river or in the open country, the more clearly I see that there can be nothing finer or greater than the simple and natural performance of the ordinary duties of everyday life."

Maturity

His *Chhinnapatra* ("Torn Letters"), which was not published until 1912, and parts of which have been translated into English in *Glimpses of Bengal*, illustrate this period charmingly, some passages of this work are among the finest specimens of the poet's prose. These refreshing pictures are instructive mosaics of country life in Bengal and at the same time an important contribution to the knowledge of Tagore's development at this stage.

Close contact with nature brings him a wealth of impressions which the poet's receptive spirit stores up for future use. It also gives him peace of mind, directs his thoughts and brings him a profound understanding of the purpose of life. He sees that everything in nature from the beauty of our world to the starry magnificence of the skies performs its task, that all these wonders strive to fulfil their mission, and that within the limits set for it each unit works to the best of its ability. He is enraptured by this recognition, and his letters echo his feelings. The everyday occurrences of Bengali country life provide the themes for his reflections. One day, for example, his servant was late. When he finally came he greeted him as usual, stood around for a little while and with short interruptions informed Tagore that his eight-year-old daughter had died. Then he started cleaning up. The author is prompted to reflect how much the performance of his duty helps a man to overcome the petty and even the more important worries of life. ~~Over~~ "Over man's personal sorrows and joys," he writes, "there is a firm stone vault, over which rattle cars of duty with human loads, stopping only at certain

fixed spots." It is this harsh necessity to work which, in the poet's opinion, is man's surest consolation; he illustrates this in the poem *Fate*, contained in a subsequent collection called *Chaitāli*.

In the preface to the English selected edition the poet writes that these letters fill the most fertile period of his literary life, when he was young and less well known. In the exuberance of youth and in his plentiful leisure-time it was a delightful necessity to him to write letters of non-commercial character, other kinds of literary work, he says, are the property of the author and are published in order that the author may profit from them, but letters written and given to private individuals once and for all are more munificent gifts. On his fiftieth birthday his niece Indira, to whom the poet was at that time united by the bonds of a warm friendship, and to whom most of the letters written in that period were sent, gave him finely-executed copies of a selection of them, knowing their value and rightly judging that he would be pleased to renew his memories of those days, when, protected by the fact that he was not yet known, he was freer than at any other period of his life.

In one of these letters, written in 1891, when he was just thirty, he said he was suddenly seized by a longing to return to the days of his early youth and to try to live a fuller and more satisfactory life, to go through the world with a poet's song on his lips, on the waves of the rising tide, to sing to the world and conquer human hearts, to see what the world had in store for him, let himself be known and to learn to know others,

to pass through youth and life like a fresh breeze and then to return home to a full and fertile old age.

This seemed to be the poet's declaration of faith. In the succeeding years he put it into practice. The rich blossom of his manhood matured, and its harvest was plentiful beyond measure.

In 1891 he published one of his finest works, the lyrical drama *Chitrāṅgadā* (the English translation bears the name "Chitra"), a masterly work in a different key from his previous plays. Its theme is taken from the story in *Mahābhārata* 1, 215 of the beautiful daughter of Prince Chitravahana of Maṇipur. One of Chitravahana's ancestors had for a long time no children, and in order to obtain seed he led a life of strict penance after the fashion of the ancient Indians. The god Śiva took pity on him and, as the god willed it, a son was born to him, each of his descendants, too, had only one son. But in the case of Chitravahana the god's word proved powerless and a daughter was born to him whom he called Chitrāṅgadā. He educated her like a son, initiated her into all the duties of a king, and gave her in marriage to Arjuna under the express condition that his son was to be considered a descendant of the family of Chitravahana.

This legend, after it passed through the furnace of Tagore's art, acquired an entirely different form. The purpose of Tagore's treatment is to answer the old question put centuries ago by Plato, what is the true essence of man's love for woman.

Chitrāṅgadā, love-sick, complains to Madana, god of love, and Basanta, the god of Spring and eternal youth,

that she has fallen in love with Arjuna, but awoke no love in him. "One day I rode out alone into a deep, lonely wood on 'a bank of the river Purna, to trail an antelope. I bound my horse to a tree. On an impassable, winding path I discovered the tracks of an antelope and followed them. In the depths of the virgin forest, full of the humming of insects, under the dark canopy of foliage I suddenly saw in front of me a man lying on the ground across the path, as if fatigued, clad in shabby raiment. I ordered him disdainfully to rise and get out of my path. He neither stirred nor looked in my direction. Trembling with violent rage I thrust at him with the end of my bow. Immediately the whole of his slim body rose before me with lightning speed like a tongue of flame suddenly shooting out of a smoky fire when melted butter is poured into it. For a moment he stared into my face, but his angry expression vanished once more. A slight smile of concealed curiosity played at the corner of his lips, I think my likeness to a boy amused him." Chitraigada regrets that she learned how to use a bow, but not how to avoid the darts of the god of love nor to shoot flashes out of the corners of her eyes. She would like to dazzle Arjuna by her beauty. She is no woman, she says, to hide her despair in the calm of solitude, watering it with tears by night and by day concealing it with a patient smile. She asks the gods to rid her body of all the faults due to her boyish education, and to give her, at least for a day, perfect beauty, with which to conquer Arjuna. Afterwards she is willing to bear the yoke of the future, in which there will perhaps be no more love for her. The gods hear

her prayer and breathe all the magic of Spring flowers into her body for one year. This beauty, the most radiant which ever clad a mortal, destroys the peace of Arjuna's heart. Arjuna does not even listen to Chitrañgada's warning not to allow himself to be dazzled and not to sacrifice his noble aims to the illusion of a moment. Later Chitrañgada tells the gods that the passionate cry of Arjuna's heart was irresistible, that she was not able to send him away like a beggar and that her shame fell to her feet with her clothes.

The poet now entirely abandons the old legend and describes the pain of Chitrañgada's heart. With masterly art he accentuates the antithetical emotions an intoxicating feeling of delight alternates with burning pain, for the ecstasy experienced with her beloved was gained by *borrowed* beauty. Her own body becomes a rival whom she sends to her lover, and she has to watch him embrace her. In piercing pain she begs the gods to take back her beauty, and says that she could bear rejection by her lover more easily than this pain. Basanta's advice, however, calms her after the flowers of Spring comes the victory of the fruit in Autumn. Then the time will come of itself when her lover will accept in her the lasting, fertile truth. Chitrangada is enabled to say consolatory words of wisdom to Arjuna: "Do not wish the evening's satiation to have greater consequences than the desire of your morning harvest. Joy changes into pain if the doors by which pain could leave are closed." But Arjuna's mind, too, matures. He himself asks Chitrangada to give him instead of her beauty, which is difficult to grasp, as the colour of the clouds,

the play of the waves or the scent of flowers is hard to preserve, something that lasts longer than the pleasure of sensuality.

The gods remind Chitraṅgada that only one more night is left of the period of a year, and that the beauty of her body will return to the inexhaustible treasures of Spring, but they grant Chitraṅgada's wish that in this last hour her beauty should be resplendent with all its radiance. Chitraṅgada asks Arjuna why he is buried in thought and of whom he is dreaming. When she learns from him that he is trying to conjure up the thoughts of Chitraṅgada, of whose courage he has heard on all sides, she objects that Chitrangada is not beautiful, that though she can throw a spear through the strongest shield, she cannot penetrate the hero's heart, and if people say that for strength and wisdom she equals a man, and for tenderness a woman, these very qualities are a fault in her. A woman should be only a woman. He would certainly have passed her, too, without even glancing at her, if she were not beautiful. She asks him not to think about manly strength but to rejoice in her beauty. Arjuna considers it his duty to protect the villagers, now that Chitrangada, who protected them before, has gone away somewhere, he would like to know, he says, what she lacked to make her go away. Chitrangada knows what she lacked. She is a poor creature, her woman's heart is like the spirit of a desolate morning to which beauty has been denied. She asks Arjuna if he would become reconciled to it, if she, the companion of his love's delight, were by some magic to be deprived of her loveliness; whether she would

keep his heart, if instead of the character of flowers she had that of a young, fresh mountain pine? Arjuna admits that he never knows what his beloved is like. Sometimes, in the mysterious depths of her sad glance, in the play of her words, he suspects a hidden desire to destroy the charm of her body. He longs, he says, to reveal her true spirit and unveil her soul, whereas up to now he has only learnt to know the beauty of her exterior.

At the very moment Arjuna comes to this conclusion, the divine magic which conferred beauty upon Chitrangada ceases, and Chitrangada stands before him, in a man's attire, but bringing him the heart of a woman. She promises him that he will learn to know her real character if he allows her to share the great work of his life, and will learn to know her completely when she sends him the son who is already the treasure of her life.

Chitrāṅgadā, *Rājā o rānī*, and *Bisarjan* are written in blank verse, which was introduced into Bengali literature by Madhusudan Datta (1824-73), the poet and translator, who also translated the ancient Indian drama *Ratnāvalī* into English

Those were eventful times and a definite attitude to various questions was necessary. In November 1891 a new periodical, *Sādhanā*, was founded, whose purpose it was to instruct its readers on all questions of culture and cultural policy. During the four years of its existence Rabindranath Tagore provided more than half its contents. Each new event was made the object of his reflections, and his personal attitude to it was imparted to his readers in *Sādhanā*. He rightly opines, for example,

that education must be directed by the spirit of the country, and that the language of instruction has to be the indigenous tongue, Bengali. Even at this time he occupied himself with the idea of founding an institution of advanced instruction which should be permeated by this spirit. He disagreed with the spirit of the British administration, which, he felt, regarded the Indian people as a lower order of creation. The poet admits, however, that the Indians had got into the habit of bearing everything with folded hands—natural catastrophes, the oppression of their rulers and the tyranny of their sacred books. They raise no objections, and are therefore, he says, eternally downtrodden. He does not deal gently with his compatriots. He complains that they are constantly working to erect a barrier of regulations and rules around themselves, and that they carefully draw their curtains, in order to avoid seeing the world. "I am astonished that they have not already made covers for the flowering plants, and a canopy to veil the moon."

The petty events of every day, such as occur on country estates, brought him into ~~close~~ contact with the people and induced him to write stories which he also first published in *Sādhana*. These stories are not, however, realistic descriptions, for we feel all the time that they conceal hidden forces, the author directs their working and influence on the lives of his characters to suit his views of the social order. The majority of these stories, however, are made up in such a way as to give the impression of realistic pictures. Many of them are also ennobled by a social mission, both Tagore's literary and his practical activities at this period have a social

character. He places a very high value on human feelings. He does not describe his characters' actions, but first analyses and then portrays, with a very delicate touch. He illuminates his miniature in the eyes of his readers by skilfully-directed rays, and demonstrates their concealed and apparent individuality. Sometimes he shows a character in one situation only, at another time he follows a long period of his life, and sometimes even brings more than one generation on the scene. Everything is unusually vivid, though in short stories of this kind a writer has to be very economical. The comparison with Kipling is instructive whereas Kipling, in his Indian tales, emphasizes the unusual and remarkable, Tagore's stories depict the everyday, natural course of Indian life. The theme of the stories is usually taken from present-day family life in a town or a Bengali village, which he knew very thoroughly, and at this period observed from close quarters. Political life does not often provide the scene of the story, although this environment, too, is not entirely neglected. He prefers analyzing pain rather than pleasure, he frequently shows his hero in conflict with rigid prejudices or social laws, or depicts a man in conflict with the law, arousing the reader's sympathy for his trifling faults. The author is particularly fond of devoting his attention to the figure of an Indian girl or widow, obviously because they are socially weak and their life is sanctified by sacrifice. The happiest tales are those which describe ordinary country life, although they are simple and transparent as "the crystal waters of a Bengali stream." It is interesting that the tales which deal with the upper classes

appear to be less true to life. Vividness and freshness, charm of expression, artistic character portraits and penetration of the confused maze of the human mind, the desire to understand the indecision of men's thoughts, but above all the rich and spicy flavour of the Bengali country-side, with delightful narrative art, occasionally humorous or fantastic, are the characteristics of these stories. One other thing all these stories have in common. The author frequently, when putting the finishing touches to one of his sketches, utilizes a simile which he carefully defines and artistically polishes. The simple fact that people who meet after an interval of years are no longer the same is expressed as follows "A few days later the man and woman met. When a stone splits it can be easily and firmly joined together again. But man is a living being, every moment he becomes a little different, he is constantly changing, when people part, they can no longer be joined together after a long separation in the same way as they were joined together before" It is as if everything in the stories breathed and took its part in life, the courtyard of the village hut, trees in the yard and lifeless stones.

The stone steps leading to the river (the *ghāt*), which have seen so many people and human sorrows, are also able to share human feelings and tell of them, it is sufficient merely to sit on them and listen to the murmur of the water. *Ghāter kathā* ("The Tale of the Steps") is one of the first stories. The sunshine lies on the ghat like a champak blossom. A Brahmin comes there to bathe, and the women walk up and down for water. The maiden Kusum comes too, who is so charming

that when her shadow falls on the surface of the river the ghat tries to keep her on its stony surface. The river, too, likes her. But one day Kusum did not come, and her companions could not call her by the many endearing variations of her name. From their conversation the ghat learned that the maiden has been betrothed, young as she was, and that according to the Bengali custom she has been sent to the home of her husband's parents. There, however, there was no river and everything was strange; it was as if a water lotus had been taken and transplanted into sand. A year passed, and the women seldom spoke of her. One day the ghat was startled. It felt the well-known pressure of her feet, which, however, like widows', were bare of joyfully-sounding bells. Years had passed. Kusum had grown up into a beautiful woman, but the ghat and the people who passed over it to the river still only saw her as a girl. Then there came a wandering saint, a well-built man with a light complexion, and settled down in Śiva's temple near the ghat. The women put down their jugs and went away to the temple to make obeisance to the saint. The number of his followers grew from day to day. The holy man gave them advice and distributed medicines. Once during an eclipse of the sun, many pilgrims came to the river, among them women from the place where Kusum lived after her marriage. The ghat heard how one of the women, seeing the saint, whispered to another that he was Kusum's husband, the other woman contradicted her, saying that Kusum's husband had surely died; a third woman disagreed with both, saying that Kusum's husband had not so long a beard. This settled the matter

for them. One evening Kusum herself came and sat down on the ghat. Hearing the holy men leave the temple, she suddenly looked back, the moon shone full on her face, but Kusum quickly drew her *sāri* over her head and bowed to the saint. He asked her who she was, and learned that she was called Kusum. No word more was spoken between them that evening, but the holy man sat on the ghat so long that the moon completed its journey from east to west, and the holy man's shadow, formerly behind him, appeared before him. From that evening Kusum went every day to the temple to make obeisance to the holy man, to bring flowers to the divinity of the temple, after which she would wash the steps of the temple, and listen to the holy man's words. In spring she disappeared for a time. What happened with her during this time, the ghat does not know. But when she returned and the holy man chid her for her long absence from the temple, it was clear from her answer that he had become the man of her dreams. But the holy man reminded her that she must realize that he does not belong to this world, and asked her to forget him. He himself, he said, would go away the same night. Kusum promised this wordlessly, nodding. And the ghat saw her standing on its stones gazing at the surface of the water, her only friend. "If now, in her trouble, it did not take her into its arms, who would do so?" The ghat ends its story in almost exactly the same way as the old Bengali ballad, *Dhopār pāt* ("The Washerman's Daughter"). The wind blew fiercely, as though it wished to blow away the light of the moon and the light of the stars, so that they should not know

what is happening on earth. The maiden who played so long on its stony knee went away, it knows not where, it only heard the water eddy.

The story entitled *Nashanid* ("The Lost Nest") is interesting as having scandalized the Bengali public. In Bengali families there is often a friendly comradeship between a man's younger brothers and his wife, such as never exists between an elder brother and his younger brother's wife. In the story in question, Tagore, in the opinion of the local critics, disparaged this relationship, when he described how a woman, neglected by her very busy husband, fell in love with his younger brother. The description of the heroine's character is very delicately drawn; the growth of her affection, at first not suspected, is carefully prepared, and the reader does not condemn its climax, the less so because it is not repeated.

Part of the misery and suffering of a country doctor and his conflict with the local policeman is described by the story *Bad Conscience*.

The Indian woman's paramount wish is to give her husband a son. However miserable her position is, an Indian woman is always conscious of the fact that her place in the family is sacrosanct, for only she can give her husband a son who will bear his name, sacrifice to his dead ancestors, and perpetuate the family. To fulfil this sacred duty an Indian woman is capable of making every sacrifice, even one that a European woman would not understand. In the story *The Woman between Them* he describes such a woman. Her name is Harasundari and she is happy with her husband. Suddenly she becomes aware, however, that she has not given him

an heir, and suspects that she will not be able to give him one. One radiant moonlight night she decides to make the greatest sacrifice of which the loving heart of a woman is capable, and herself to persuade her husband to take another wife. Harasundari does not want her husband to be robbed of the joy of having a son "A great love was born in her which desired to find a vent in great pain, as the stormy sea breaks against the rocky shore." The great pain comes indeed when her husband allows himself to be persuaded and really does marry, and Harasundari sees how the new wife comes between herself and her husband and how his love to his new wife hurts her. Nevertheless she sacrifices herself and fulfils what she had undertaken, serving the new wife—not, however, as she had imagined it, but as a slave "A woman is usually a slave, but at the same time a queen; here, however, by a division of the rôles one woman became only a queen and the other only a slave."

In the story entitled *Subhā*, too, a dumb girl is sacrificed and no one cares for the sorrow in her heart. Her mother considered her as unworthy of her womb, because she was dumb, "for a mother sees in a daughter more of herself than in a son, and considers each of the imperfections of her daughter as her own fault." Her father, Banikanth loved her, it is true, but did not show it. Her friends were two cows, who, though they never heard their names from her lips, understood the language of her steps. Subhā was married to a man who did not know that she was dumb. Nobody thought that it was not her fault. Only her two big eyes spoke, but there was nobody to understand them. 'Endless

tears ravaged the girl's heart—but nobody, except the Invisible, heard them ”

The language of these tales is exceptionally charming. At times it takes on epical volume, still in the Bankim-chandra tradition, but it already betrays Tagore's characteristic charm, frequently with an unexpected cadence of thought, and courses fluently with remarkable and masterly clarity

These stories were a revolutionary event in the world of Bengali literature, apart from certain lyrical poems they are Tagore's finest work. They are an ornament to Bengali literature and will always remain a rich contribution to world literature

Later they were published in a number of collected editions *Chhota galpa* ("Short Stories"), *Bichitra galpa* ("Sundry Tales"), *Galpa chārīti* ("Four Tales"), *Galpa-daśak* ("Ten Tales"), *Galpaguchcha* ("Collected Tales") in five volumes. Later, in 1917, a further collection entitled *Galpa-saptak* ("Seven Tales"), was published.

If we read through the harvest of poems yielded by the years 1892 and 1897, which was published with the symbolic title *Senā tārī* ("Golden Barge"), we recognize how complicated a poetical phenomenon Tagore represents. Passion gives way to reflection, which now starts to impress itself more and more upon his poems. It appears to us as though his poetic vision was at times inspired by some mysterious force. Tagore's new conception, which gives this strange intonation to certain of his poems, causes some of the poetical *motifs* of this period to seem to lose clarity and become veiled by a sort of mysterious haze; this conception undoubtedly

originates in the sphere of Indian philosophy. Even the old Upanishads distinguish between that part of a man which sees and hears and the divine essence in him, the emanation of the great divine unity, the connecting link between this life and past and future lives. The poet calls this divine essence "*Jībandebatā*" or "*Prāṇer debatā*" ("Divinity of life"). This divinity shares and at the same time judges his actions, and therefore the poet frequently turns to it. On account of this conception, which humanizes God and makes man a fellow-creature of God, a public debate ensued between Tagore and Dvijendralal Ray, a Bengali dramatist of some reputation (1860-1913). Dvijendralal accused Tagore of wishing to consider himself a sort of incarnation of deity. In his answer Tagore explained what he considers to be the essence of his religious collectivism and in what he sees man's mission. Man, he said, is not granted talents by God only at moments of delirium, he is at all times God's companion. He did not even answer Ray's reply.

His life's harvest is rich and the divinity of his life can gather it in, as he says in the introductory poem in the *Golden Barge*

"The clouds thunder in the sky, and rain falls fast, I am sitting alone, forlorn on the bank. The reaping of the vast harvest of paddy is over. The full swift river is hard to cross. The rain started falling as I was reaping the harvest.

Here in this small field I am alone. In winding streams the water runs. On the other bank I see in the morning

the cloud-covered village painted with the ink of the shadow of trees On this bank the field is small and I am alone

Who is approaching my bank, rowing his boat and singing? I think I know who he is He goes on with full sails, and does not glance to left or right, the helpless waves break on the sides of the boat I think he is known to me

Whither are you going, to what unknown land? Pray bring your boat hither a moment and come to the bank You can go wherever you like, give it to whomever you like, only come to my bank and, smiling for a little while, take my golden harvest away

Take as much on your boat as you want Have I more? No, I have not, I have loaded it all in your boat. All that beguiled me so long I have laid on the bank of the river in heaps Now have mercy and take me

There is no more room The little barge is filled by my golden harvest Deep clouds roll up on the August sky, I am left behind alone on the lonely river bank. The golden boat has taken all that I have "

More in harmony with the spirit of Indian philosophy, which saw in the world a living and active spirit, than under the influence of Schelling's romantic philosophy he invokes Nature, in a hymn to the earth (*Earth*) "O Mother Earth, bury me in your soil, scatter my ashes to the winds like the blessing of Spring! Let me break the fetters imprisoning my heart, break the wall which pens me in—let me wander from one end of the world to the other, in blows and afflictions, in light and joy!"

Maturity

In another poem he recalls his childhood days, and remembers hearing a forsaken boy singing. He apostrophizes poetry, his beloved, sings an ode to the sea which was the first beginning of everything, protests again in certain of the poems against the philosophy which demands retirement from active life and sees the purpose of life in hazy mysticism. Unhappy the land which is burdened by the teaching that this world is an illusion and a dream or a mere play. "But even if it is a game I want to take part in this game of the world, which is full of tones of joy. If everything is nothing but dust, so be it. But where can we find its equal? O prematurely aged man, do not keep sitting alone! How do you expect to grow up, if you do not play?" The poet answers the contention that life in this world is a fetter which has to be broken by saying that all love and desire for happiness is a bond, a mother's hand which removes the lips of a child from one of her breasts to the other a bond too.

Similar to the *Golden Barge* is *Chitrā*, a collection of poems of varying character as the title shows, published in 1896. The poet lived in the heart of the country, and was carried away by its beauty, as we see from the odes to evening, the woods or feminine beauty. In addition to these ambitious lyrics we find simple pictures like *A Woman's Gift*:

✓ "Once, in the morning, a blind girl brought me in the grove a garland of flowers packed in leaves. When I put it round my neck, my eyes filled with tears. I drew her to my bosom and kissed her sweet face. I said

Maturity

to her: 'O girl, you do not know yourself what treasure you are giving as you stand there in the darkness. O blind girl, you are sightless like the flower, you have not seen yourself how charming you are!' "

The poem *Urbaśī* shows an unusually powerful poetical effect. It is as if the perfect ideal of beauty was being called into existence before the eyes of the reader by the magic of his words. The diction of this poem is reminiscent of the rich style of the old Indian lyrics. The first verse reads as follows:

"O beautiful *Urbaśī*, you who live in heaven, who are neither a mother nor a daughter nor a bride! When the evening descends on the byres, drawing her golden *anchal* round her tired body, you do not light the evening lamp before the house. You go not bashfully at midnight into the bridal bed, your feet fettered by shyness, your bosom trembling, with gentle looks and gentle smile. You are uncovered like the coming of the morn, you who are unblushing!"

And once again we glimpse the presence of the mysterious "deity of life" whom he asks whether it is satisfied with him.

"O lord of my innermost self, have all your desires been satisfied by coming into my heart? I have given you the cup full of thousands of streams of joys and sorrows, which wring my breast with merciless force like grapes in the press. I have woven your bridal bed,

Maturity

weaving together numbers of colours, scents, notes and rhymes. Every day I have made new and ever new images for a moment's sport for you, by melting the gold of my desires. I do not know with what hopes you accepted me yourself. O Lord of my life, have my nights and mornings, my play and my work pleased you in your lonely home? Have you heard, sitting alone on your throne, all the songs that have sounded in my heart in the rains, in Autumn, in Spring and in Winter? Plucking flowers of fancy, have you woven garlands for your *anchal*, have you put them round your neck, have you wandered at your pleasure in the grove of my youth? O my love, what is it that you see when you fix your eyes on my heart? Have you forgiven all my omissions, faults and defects? O Lord, how many times have days without worship and nights without service passed by? The flowers of adoration have withered and dropped off, after blossoming in the lonely wood. The notes to which you tune the strings of this *bīnā* have faded away again and again. O poet, how can I sing the notes you have composed?

"On my way to water your wood I have fallen asleep in the shade and in the evening I have brought back eyes full of tears. O Lord of my life, is all now finished that I had before—all the beauty, the song, the life, awakening and slumber? Has the clasp of my arms slackened? Have my kisses lost their charm? And is the night of sportiveness in the grove of my life over? Then break off the meeting to-day, bring fresh beauty and make me new again, me the ever-old. In a new marriage you will bind me in new bonds of life!"

Up to this time Tagore's plays were written in blank verse. A charming one-act fantasy *Bidayabhiṣāp* ("The Curse at Farewell"), which dates from 1894, is written in rhymed couplets, which the poet considered are more suitable for emotional dramatic dialogue. On the old tale of the struggle between the demons and the gods, of Śukra's magic healing art, and of the sending of Kach, the son of Brihaspati, the teacher of the gods, to Śukra so that he might learn Śukra's art (Mahabharata), Tagore grafts a description of the conflict between knowledge and love.

After an apprenticeship of a thousand years Kach bids farewell to the daughter of his teacher, Debayani. There is a charming description of Debayani's compelling Kach with truly feminine art to admit that he loves her. But when she asks him to give up his longing for fame and to stay at her side, Kach refuses. She asks him whether the aim of his strenuous study was to be only knowledge, or love too, which stands as high as knowledge, perhaps even higher! Kach answers that he did not come to his teacher for his own advantage, but because the art he was to learn promised to bring benefit to the gods. Debayani considers this false, saying that he frequently neglected his study to amuse himself with her. Did he perhaps intend to come nearer to his goal through her father's seeing how he was courting the favour of his daughter? Kach assured her that this was never his intention, for he loved her truly, and begged her to forgive him. The girl objected that she could not see how he could expect her pardon, now that her whole life was ruined.

[“Shame be yours, O heartless wanderer, who came and sat through the sunny hours in the shade of my life’s garden, and, to while away time, plucked all its flowers and wove them into a garland, and at parting snapped the thread and let all the glory of a woman’s heart be desecrated to dust. Be this my curse on you. that knowledge for whose sake you have spurned me may never be fulfilled in your life. You will only bear its burden, never enjoy its use—you will teach it but shall never be able to practise it.”

Kach “And this be my blessing on you. may all your sufferings be lost in their own greatness”

The description of the old soothsayer’s hermitage, the story of Kach’s apprenticeship and the descriptions of nature follow the old pattern. The modern formulation of the problem is in sharp contrast with the style. The womanliness of the infatuated Debayanī is accentuated in the utterance of her curse. The climax, however, is in Kach’s blessing. although he loves Debayanī he sacrifices his love to the common weal. But the poet did not intend the only call upon the reader’s feelings to be the lover’s pain at parting. he wished to emphasize that man must suffer in order to achieve progress.

Of a similar character are three other dramatic dialogues written at this time (about 1897). *Gāndhārīr ābedan* (“The Request of Gandhari”), *Narakbās* (“Life in Hell”) and *Karnakuntīsambād* (“Conversation between Karna and Kunti”). In *Gāndhārīr ābedan* Queen Gandhari, wife of the blind King Dhritarashtra, is described as a heroic mother who, suppressing her maternal love for Duryodhan, whose intrigues against his cousins she

condemns, compels the king to send her malignant son into exile. She reproaches Duryodhan's wife, Bhanumatī, too, for her imprudence and blesses Yudhishtira and the other sons of Paṇḍu when they come to bid farewell to her before going into exile. She consoles their common wife, Draupadī, assuring her that those who insulted her will earn the eternal reprobation of the whole world, and that the women of the whole world will see their own abuse in hers. In the other two dialogues, (*Narakbās* and *Karnakuntīsambād*) the fulfilment of a promise given and self-sacrifice are glorified, whereas *Baikunther khātā* ("Baikuntha's Manuscript") and the delightful picture of Calcutta life *Chirakumār sabhā* ("The Bachelors' Club") are short, witty comedies.

Satī is the dramatization of a Marathi ballad. Princess Amabai was betrothed to Prince Jivaji of Bijapore. But the prince was betrayed by one of his courtiers, who arrived at the wedding before the prince and was married to Princess Amabai in disguise. The princess even had a son by him. The princess's father, Binayak Rao, sent her two letters: in the first he urged her to kill her husband, and in the second letter her mother, Ramabai, as orthodox as her royal husband, advised her to poison herself with a poison which she sent her with the letter. The scene is laid on a battlefield, on which both her husband and her former betrothed, Prince Jivaji, lie dead. Amabai cannot understand why her family consider her a blot on their caste, nor why she should expiate her supposed guilt on the funeral pyre with the corpse of Jivaji to save the family honour.

This dramatic play was a criticism of the conventional

ethics of orthodox Hindus. The two-act play *Lakshmī parīkshā* ("The Trial of Lakshmi") is written in rhymed couplets, but the lines are shorter, containing only ten syllables as opposed to the fourteen-syllable lines of the four dramatic poems named. The waiting woman Kshiro is dissatisfied with her lot and thinks that she deserves the honours due to her mistress, Queen Kalyāṇi. But when she becomes a queen herself she proves unworthy.

While he was busy writing these smaller plays and studies, he put the finishing touches to *Mālinī* (1895), a gloomy play of two acts, the theme of which is in close harmony with *Bisarjan*. In *Mālinī* the poet obviously wished to solve the problem whether love between a man and a woman can excuse the man's treachery to an old friend who is plotting to destroy the woman he loves.

The adherents of the old religion, headed by the Brahmin Kshemaṅkar, demand that the king banish from the country his daughter, Princess Malinī, who is an ardent follower of Buddha. This seems to them a terrible threat to the faith of their ancestors. Malinī is convinced that her great moment has come. She feels in her heart that those who clamour for her banishment are really calling for her. She sees a long journey before her and hears its call. She has heard that the world, which up till then she has only glimpsed through a window in the royal palace, is a world of pain. She is willing to leave the royal palace if the world really needs her. The rebels are carried away by the princess's sincerity and worship her as a goddess when she voluntarily leaves the palace and comes into their midst.

Maturity

Only Kshemañkar and Supriya, his boyhood's friend, continue to resist. Kshemañkar goes away in order to bring foreign mercenaries to protect his faith in its danger, and leaves his friend and disciple Supriya in the town to send him news of the situation. In the second act we hear Supriya confess his treachery to Malini. Under the influence of her pure spirit, and fearing for her life, he betrays to the king that Kshemañkar is approaching at the head of an army. The king, warned in time, conquers Kshemañkar and takes him prisoner. He wishes to reward Supriya and has Kshemañkar brought in chains to be executed. Kshemañkar accuses Supriya of having sacrificed his old faith in the flame of Malini's eyes, building up the new faith on the foundation of his treachery. The companion of his youth admits this, but says in his excuse that his sacred books were dumb teachers and that he read the old book of creation anew through the princess's eyes and gained the conviction that the true faith is there where man and love abide. The world, he says, is big enough for more religions than one. Kshemañkar offers to submit the dispute to a superior judge as they used to do in their youth, bringing their quarrel to the teacher in the morning, after a night of argument. No sooner does he see Supriya approach with open arms, however, than he kills him with the chains with which his hands are bound. The king wishes to slay him with his sword, but Malini begs for his pardon.

This play deeply affects both reader and audience. Both see how uniform and dramatic the plot is, and feel instinctively the fateful climax which draws nearer and

nearer, the characters are very clearly drawn, with the sole exception of Supriya, and the entire play is carefully worked out and directed to the inevitable climax. Both reader and spectator, however, are faced by a number of questions and seriously doubt whether the dramatist really desired to solve the dispute between friendship and love. Was it not rather his aim to point out the excellency of the golden mean taught by Buddha? Is this the purpose of the conclusion, when Malini, the heroine of the play, asks mercy for Kshemañkar, who has assassinated his friend? Or is Kshemankar, whose ways are guided by the old order, the hero of the play? But, after all, his instigation of the revolt cannot be sanctioned. Does not the sacrifice of Supriya appear to have been in vain? The poet himself says in his *Diary of the Five Elements*: "A poem has this peculiarity that the creative power of the poet evokes the creative power of the readers, who, according to their several temperaments, find in it some beautiful thought, or moral lesson, or philosophic truth. The poem is a lighted match and like fireworks are the readers who, at its harvest, variously shoot up into the sky, or shower forth a fountain of sparks, or explode loudly."

In 1896 Tagore published a beautiful wreath of lyric poems symbolically entitled *Chaitālī*. This word means "Late harvest," and the title was perhaps intended to indicate that the thirty-five-year-old poet, although the fountain of his inspiration still flows bountifully, feels that a change in his poetry is to be expected. There are only echoes of the turbulent desires of youth. It appears symptomatic that the main object of the poet's eulogies

Maturity

in this book is the forest. It is true that the forest is much more full of life than are rocks, the desert or the sea. But it was in the forest, too, that the old Indian *rishis* put the theory of their unity with the whole world into practice, and it was thither that they retired to meditate over the secrets of this world and the whole of life. The poet seems to turn more to the past. He looks at the world carefully, and reflectively he judges it. He rebukes his compatriots, who wear European clothes and imitate the West "Mother, you have fifty million sons, they are Bengali, but you have not made men of them." In the poem *The Ascetic* he rebukes those men who, desiring to search for God, leave their family and fail to see that it is just this step which takes them further from God

"At midnight the would-be ascetic announced:

'This is the time to give up my home and seek for God.

Ah, who has held me so long in delusion here?'

God whispered, 'I,' but the ears of the man were stopped.

With the baby asleep at her breast lay his wife,
peacefully sleeping on one side of the bed.

The man said, 'Who are ye that have fooled me so long?'

The voice said again, 'They are God,' but he heard it not.

The baby cried out in its dream, nestling close to its mother

God commanded, 'Stop, fool, leave not thy home,'
but still he heard not

Maturity

God sighed and complained, 'Why does my servant wander to seek me, forsaking me?' "

(Translated by the poet himself in *The Gardener*,
No. 75, Macmillan & Co., London.)

But it is still womanly beauty which inflames the poet's heart. A woman is the giver of all beauty, and "for the sake of a woman's beauty it is worth living in this world." The reflection of her beauty, he says in the poem *The Beloved*, assumes power over a man's heart and radiates thence all over the world. Even the blue sky would not appear beautiful to a man if the glory of a woman's face had not penetrated his mind. This poem is supplemented by *Mānasī*, in which, in exquisite terms, he propounds that woman is not only the work of the divine Creator, but also the work of a man's heart.

“O woman, you are not merely the handiwork of God, but also of men; these are ever endowing you with beauty from their hearts.

Poets are weaving for you a web with threads of golden imagery, painters are giving your form ever new immortality

The sea gives its pearls, the mines their gold, the summer gardens their flowers to deck you, to cover you, to make you more precious.

The desire of men's hearts has shed its glory over your youth.

You are one half woman and one half dream.”

(Translated by the poet himself in *The Gardener*,
No. 59, Macmillan & Co., London.)

Maturity

The poet's unswerving aim is evident not only from his subjects, but also from his medium the majority of the poems in *Chaitāli* are composed in the form of a fourteen-line rhymed sonnet.

Tagore gives a very remarkable criticism of Indian life in the form of a conversation between the five elements (water, fire, earth, air and ether) in his *Pañchabhūter dāyāri* ("Diary of the Five Elements") published in 1897. The conversation of the elements, which are wittily characterized (the earth, for example, speaks like an opportunist, water like a soft-hearted, self-sacrificing mother, the air like an idealist) is vivid and humorous, full of sharp observation. The poet himself plays the part of a Greek chorus, a sort of ideal mediator between the elements. In the course of the conversation, for example, it is stated that religion should be founded on love. The simple countryman is seen through the eyes of Rousseau and the dynamic force of life through those of Bergson. The tale of Kach and Debayanī is not lacking in humour. As regards aesthetic criticism, there is a very interesting explanation of Ramayāṇa, and a discussion of the emancipation of woman which is of extreme social interest. Even to-day the book is eagerly read in the poet's school at Śantiniketan.

At the end of the year 1899 the poet published a volume of witty fancies, epigrammatic couplets and aphorisms entitled *Kanikā* ("Trifles") to which, as is evident from the title, he attaches no value, but which give evidence of the sincerity of his moral convictions and his desire to penetrate into the maze of the human mind. The Orient's liking for this type of literature is

well known. The poet himself translated most of them into English during his journey to Japan in 1916. "The Game of Life," he says, for example, "consists both of life and death, just as walking consists of lifting the foot and setting it down." On another occasion he conveys his lesson in a short story:

"A moth entered the Mahabharata; it made its way through and pierced it from cover to cover

"A scholar, opening it, saw this, he put his hands to his head and said 'O moth, what have you done? There is so much food in the dust on which you can sharpen your teeth and fill your stomach!' The moth replied 'What has happened? Why are you so angry? What was in it? Only black marks! Things which I do not understand I consider useless, and therefore I ate my way through it, and pierced it, and destroyed it from cover to cover' "

The poet wished his message to be heard by as many as possible. For this reason in *Kshanikā* ("The Fleeting One") he used colloquial language more than was usual in literary work, and abbreviated words, for example, as is done in ordinary speech. Without giving the matter much thought, his critics objected to the vulgarity of his language and accused him of being cosmopolitan and colourless. In a poem entitled *The Fruits of Life*, which is contained in this book, he defends himself against those critics who condemn his poetry merely out of opposition to him. In his next reincarnation, he says, he will become a severe critic of his own poems; the critics who must always contradict him will then

Maturity

be in the comic situation of having to praise him. But he cannot give up poetry, although old age is coming, for poetry has become his beloved, to whom he has sacrificed everything. After speaking humorously in this poem of the subjectivity of criticism, some time later (in 1903) he devoted a serious and penetrating article to the criticism of literary works. He is of the opinion that the only objective method of arriving at a just valuation of literary work is to compare it with masterpieces of the past. The poems contained in this book are very tuneful, for the author selects particularly melodious words, some are ironical, but humorously so, although a more thoughtful vein, a foretaste of his later style, is not completely absent. The forty-year-old poet is not afraid of balancing his accounts, though the noon of his life is nearing. "When I sit on the edge of the world I sum up the accounts of good and evil for my future life, who will allow the secret thoughts of two pairs of eyes that have met in the shadow of the *bakul* grove, and desire, gazing one into the other, to measure their strength in the austere music, to be echoed by the chords of the lute?"

Before he reached the age of forty he published *Kalpanā* ("Dreams"), a work of great poetic value, rich not only in inspiration, but also in poetical invention, and so fascinating that the reader believes he hears the poet's heart beat, and thinks and feels with him. At the same time his verses are firmly welded. One of his dreams, from which he said he had to awaken with bitter disappointment, was his hope that Bengal would recognize his merits. In the poem *Year's End* he says

Maturity

that the end of the year came in an unexpected storm, and sees in this fact a foretaste of the future. Half in melancholy, half humorously, he balances accounts not only with the old year, but also with his old poetry, against which his critics were loudly clamouring at this time. But there can be no doubt that the poet was continually developing. Some of the poems ~~excel~~ in the extraordinary colourfulness and expressive intuition of their description of natural phenomena. Erotic poems like *Shame* occur less and less frequently in his work:

“Why did you not awaken me before the night was over? Now it is late in the day and I die of shame. How shall I walk on the street when shame fetters my feet? Look, at the touch of light the *śephālī* flower withers at the heart and falls from the stem. Why did you not awaken me before the night was over? Now it is late in the day and I die of shame. Blessed was the lamp of the night when it was blown out by the morning wind. The night moon hides in the corner of the sky, looking for a refuge. A bird sings—the night is over. The maidens are fetching water in pitchers. How shall I go to work with this unkempt hair of mine? Why did you not awaken me before the night was over? Now it is late in the day and I die of shame.”

Some of the poems are permeated by a weight of melancholy which is also betrayed in the choice of themes. Here is, for example, *The Ruined Temple*:

“Deity of the ruined temple! The broken strings of the *bīṇā* sing no more your praise. The bells in the evening proclaim not your time of worship. The air is still and silent about you.

In your desolate dwelling comes the vagrant spring breeze. It brings the tidings of flowers—the flowers that for your worship are offered no more.

Your worshipper of old wanders ever longing for favour still refused. In the eventide, when fires and shadows mingle with the gloom of dust, he wearily comes back to the ruined temple with hunger in his heart.

Many a festival day comes to you in silence, deity of the ruined temple. Many a night of worship goes away with lamp unlit.

Many new images are built by masters of cunning art and carried to the holy stream of oblivion when their time is come.

Only the deity of the ruined temple remains unworshipped in deathless neglect ”

(Translated by the poet himself for the English edition of *Gītāñjali*, No. 88, Macmillan & Co., London.)

In some of the poems Tagore recalls with pride the magnificence of ancient India, although never, even in the succeeding stage of his development, was his art carried away by biased political passions. The song *Bhāratalakshmī*, a translation of which follows, was five years later sung by every patriot in Bengal at the time of the patriotic movement which caught up Rabindranath too, in its frenzy.

Maturity

“Thou who dost charm the heart of all the world,
Thou land gleaming with the golden glory of the sun,
Thou mother of our fathers and mothers,
The soles of whose feet are washed by the waters of
the blue sea,
Whose green skirts are fluttered by the breeze,
Whose forehead, the Himalayas, is kissed by the
skies,
Who wearest the diamond diadem of the snows;
It was in thy hermitages that the first hymns were
sung.
Words of wisdom, religion, poetry, history, first
Were preached in thy forest temples.
Thou art blessed, the eternal dispenser of good
Thou dost distribute food from land to land,
{ The Ganges and the Jumna are the milk of mercy
flowing from thy breast.”

(Translated by Nihal Singh for
The Golden Book of Tagore)

When *Sādhanā* ceased to appear, Rabīndranath turned his attention to *Bhāratī*, which he edited for two years (1898–99), in April 1901 he took over the editorship of *Bangadarśan* which he held for five years.

Chapter Four

LOFTIER THEMES

DEVOTION TO PUBLIC WORKS

UP to the second half of the eighteenth century Bengali poetry was exclusively religious. Only with Bharat-chandra's rhymed novel *Bidyāsundar* do we find in Bengali literature secular poetry, which regards love as an interesting and exciting part of human life and does not even avoid frivolity. Tagore's poetry was at first secular, and carried away his readers by its passionate sentiments. At the close of the century, however, it starts to become more spiritual.

The transition to the new era is provided by *Kathā o kāhinī* ("Stories and Tales"), published in 1900, which became a pattern to future generations both for matter and for manner. The most remarkable form of strophe was the so-called *gāthā*, which is composed of six lines, four consisting of eight syllables, while the third and sixth lines have ten syllables, rhymed *a a b c c b*. A rhymed story alternates with a ballad or a poetical paraphrase of an old legend, a Buddhist tale or a fable from the later period of heroic struggles against the Mughal rulers. The basic theme is human justice, self-sacrifice, heroism and any noble actions, the poet adapts some details of the

Loftier Themes

themes chosen to suit his view. In *The Best Alms*, for example, a paraphrase from an old Buddhist work, *Avadānaśataka*, he stresses the importance of true humility and sincere, all-renouncing love. Buddhist love for one's neighbour, which was particularly cultivated by the Buddhists of the North, is sung in the ballad, *The Meeting*:

“The monk Upagupta
Was once asleep
By the walls of the city of Mathura.
The lights of the city have gone out in the wind.
The doors are shut in the houses of the city.
The stars of the night are hidden
By thick clouds in the August sky.
All of a sudden a foot decked out with bells struck
his chest.
The monk woke up with a start,
His drowsiness fled away in a moment.
The light of the rude lamp
Struck his eyes, beautiful with mercy
The dancer of the city,
✓ Intoxicated with the wine of youth,
Was going to meet her lover.
Her attire was a flowing dark blue dress,
And her bracelets rang as she walked.
Vasavadatta paused
When her feet touched the body of the monk.
She held up the lamp
And looked at his youthful beauty.
His face was calm and smiling.

Loftier Themes

His eyes were full of the rays of mercy
And on his white forehead gleamed
Cool peace like the moon.

The woman said gently
With bashfulness in her eyes.
'Pray, O monk,
Come to my house.

The earth is hard and rough
It is no bed for you.'

The monk said kindly then:
'O well of all beauty,
It is not yet time for me.

Go, maiden, whither you are going;
When the hour strikes
I shall come of myself to you.'

✓ Suddenly the storm opened its wide mouth
In the flashes of the lightning.

The woman started up in fear,
The conch shell of destruction flew in the wind
And in the sky the roaring thunder laughed.

The year has not yet ended,

The evening of April has come

The air is impatient and restless.

There are blossoms on the trees by the roadside;

And in the king's garden there blossom

The *bakul* trees, *pārul* trees and the *rajanīgandha*.

From far down the distant road the sound of a flute,
Intoxicating, comes carried by the wind.

The city is empty.

All the citizens have gone

To the honey-woods for the flower-festival.

Loftier Themes

The full moon laughs, looking down silently
On the lonely city.

On a solitary path in the moonlight
The monk was journeying alone.
In the tops of a row of trees
The *kokil* cried over and again.
Has after so long the day of love's meeting come?
The monk went past the city, to the edge of the city
wall

He went and stood by the moat
In the darkness of a mango grove.
Who is that woman lying forsaken at his feet?
Her body was full of the fearful disease of smallpox.
The townsfolk had thrown her, smeared
With the ink of disease, outside the city wall
To avoid her poisonous touch.
The monk sat down
And took the senseless head upon his lap.
He poured water on her dry lips,
And uttered charms over her head,
He smeared her body with cool sandal paste
With his own hands.
The blossoms were dropping,
The *kokil* was singing,
The night was mad with moonlight
The woman asked in the night
'Who, O merciful one, are you that have come?'
The monk replied 'Vasavadatta,
To-night my time has come
And I am here.' "

His poetry acquired a tone of humble piety which is particularly evident in the collection of one hundred songs entitled *Naibedya* ("Offerings"). The forty-year-old poet found a new attitude to the world through his God, it is as if he wanted to make sure of His favour. Humble and solitary, he discovers a comrade in God, and finds touching words in his heart for His healing grace. He thinks of Him by day and by night, during his work and when slumber descends on his tired eyes. He begs Him never to forsake him.

"If this door of my heart is ever closed, then come into my heart by breaking the door and do not go back, O Lord!

If some days on the strings of this *bīnā* your dear name is not sung, then please wait a little and do not go back, O Lord!

If ever by your summons the drowsiness of my sleep does not break, then awaken me with severe pain and do not go back, O Lord!

If some day I make somebody else sit with love on your seat, then, O my eternal King, do not go back, O Lord!"

(*Naibedya*, No. 5.)

Elsewhere he complains of the burning pain of his despair, for the rain of love has not fallen on his parched heart, he begs that the cloud of mercy may descend to him like a mother's look during a father's anger, or, if such be His wish, that He should send a storm bringing the darkness of death (No. 18). He has unlimited con-

fidence in his God (No. 20) · “Whom Thou givest Thy banner Thou givest the strength to carry it. Thou givest him love that he may be able to bear the strain of Thy service I therefore desire with all my heart that I may be liberated from suffering by suffering. I do not desire to achieve salvation by avoiding the pain which is the gift of Thy hand ”

As early as in the fourteenth century Chandidas, the great Bengali mystic, sang of sublime love of God which he achieves through suffering. It should not be forgotten, however, that “pain” is Tagore’s poetic expression not only for actual physical pain, but also for every renunciation, every effort and every dutiful act

Even at this time we find poems expressive of Tagore’s typical calm and even joyous acceptance of death. Death is the Lord’s messenger, and the poet welcomes him with humility and honours him with the treasure of his heart. The messenger of death returns to the Lord, leaving only a dark shadow on the poet’s heart. This of course is part of his belief that this life is one of the endless chain of past and future lives “The entire circle of my lives will light millions of lights with Thy flame and place them in Thy temple,” the poet exclaims in poem No. 30 But persistently, perhaps for this very reason, he proclaims, in the same poem, very definitely, a philosophy of optimism · “Liberation does not lie for me in renunciation. I shall enjoy the sweetness of liberation in the innumerable bonds of pleasure ” He rejects, however, a joy of life which gives way to a feverish desire for money, possessions or self-indulgence.

In addition to a number of such religious lyrics the

book contains a series of patriotic songs recalling with pride the country's history and vowing to serve it. The poet attacks the alien desire for riches and consoles India, bidding it not to take too hardly its material poverty. He warmly desires freedom for his country, but wishes this freedom to be constructive. But his patriotism, too, has a realistic basis. He loves his country because India's ideal was always freedom of thought. The history of India's civilization witnesses that the Indians have always respected not only heroism, but also hospitality, tolerance and all the spiritual possessions. Had not their early forefathers, seeing that the Dravidians whom they found in India when they invaded it were a craft and art-loving people, laid aside their swords and learned from them? This desire, it is said, still remains one of India's characteristics.

In this collection, too, most of the poems are fourteen-line sonnets with a progressive rhyme, the stanzas are arranged very freely.

In Silaidah the poet's dynamic spirit became suddenly aware of the smallness of his scope. He longed to break the barriers of his solitude and take a greater part in the reorganization of his country's life, to put his ideals into practice. He saw that the young Bengali patriotism was falling into childish errors, but that on the other hand a foggy cosmopolitanism was weakening the minds of his countrymen. He recognized the strength of Western culture, but was opposed to its blind imitation. He was of the opinion that an indigenous culture on a firm foundation must be built up, and was profoundly convinced that his countrymen need not feel themselves

at a disadvantage compared with the powerful nations of the earth, for even if they lack political freedom it was always India's ideal to have freedom of thought. Thus, he says, was at the same time the ideal of the old Indian theory of education, which he considered it necessary to propagate.

In order to give concrete form to this idea he left Śilaidah and, with his father's consent, settled down, in December 1901, at Śantiniketan, which was radiant with memories of his father's wise guidance during his youth, he proceeded to found a national Indian school there on the pattern of the old Indian *āśrama*. He intended its spirit to be quite different from that of the school of his boyhood days, which was unable to captivate his mind. In this task a typical Indian aristocrat identified himself with the crying needs of the widest masses of his nation. His optimistic philosophy led him from theory to practice; a writer of love lyrics became a sower of the seed of humanity and the teacher of his nation. Whereas the development of the Indian school system under European rule tended to produce a series of town schools, the poet tried here to arrest this development and to reintroduce the country environment of education which was usual in India of old. In the name of peace (*śāntam*), good (*śivam*) and union (*advaitam*) he invited co-operation. At first the school had a few pupils only, so that the contact with them was closer, and a profound influence was exercised on their minds. The poet took part in their games, diverted them by recitals from the national epics and made up stories for them. His endeavour was to make them as happy as possible and

to give them as much freedom as possible. He wished the pupils to feel that they were trusted, and in this atmosphere of trust and self-reliance they were to grow up, shaping their own development. [A child has an innate desire for development, and the task of education is to remove the ignorance which hinders this development, sharpen the child's perceptions, and encourage creative energy. From its earliest youth a child's mind should be awakened and independent thought be encouraged, and ranked by the teacher higher than mere memorizing. The school should be a temple, in which the teacher, conscious of the precious material entrusted to him, guides the child's soul to an ever higher degree of humanity.] From the very beginning the lessons were held in the open air, in the shade of the spreading branches of the trees, in a veritable garden school. Tagore tried to awaken the child's heart to response, to encourage it and tempt it to try out its own faculties. Tagore says that a child's mind is like a seed which is intended to sprout and give a new crop, not like a grain which is destined to be ground between two mill-stones. He says, too, that only he who loves may punish. Although the education is purely Indian, intended to preserve the Indian character, the school is by no means opposed to the spirit of Western progress. Under the supervision and guidance of the teachers the pupils are led to independent work and to appreciation of the old Indian spirit, literary tradition, sculpture and painting. Excursions to historically memorable places are frequently arranged. At other times musicians and artisans are invited to Santiniketan to show the pupils their art

and handiwork. The school workshops are intended to awaken the child's curiosity in the same way. From the very beginning the school accepted both children of the high castes and children of outcaste parents as well, which was a mighty deed if we consider that at this period the children of outcaste parents were frequently expelled from the school building itself so that they should not defile the children of higher caste. There is only one restriction: an inscription on the gate proclaims that no animals may be killed within the precincts of the sanctuary, whether for sacrifice or for food, and that only one God may be worshipped.

The work thrived, the number of boys from all corners of India entrusted to the poet grew, and after a few years more than one hundred boys were being taught in Śāntiniketan, who were growing up and becoming collaborators in the regeneration of India towards progress and true humanity. Later a girls' school was founded in Śāntiniketan as well. Co-education was introduced and proved successful. The girls, too, indulge in plenty of games, particularly rhythmical dancing, of which the poet is very fond.

On the anniversary of the foundation of the school Śāntiniketan receives a number of guests, especially from near-by Calcutta. On these occasions the poet's usual Wednesday discourses in Śāntiniketan temple assume more festive character. These hortative discourses were collected and published; the first edition appeared in 1908, the second in 1935 (in two volumes).

On the 1909 anniversary of the foundation the poet delivered the following sermon:

“What is there in this *Āśram*? There are the fields and the sky and the shade-spreading trees, space and purity all round. The wonderful play of the clouds in the sky and the rotation of the sun and moon, planets and stars are here in no way concealed. Here in this little grove, in the midst of the fields, the seasons appear in the fulness of their form with all their clouds, light, scent and colour, flowers and fruits and all their wonderful preparations—they are not dwarfed by any impediments. This unhindered manifestation all around and in the midst of it the worship of *śāntam*, *śivam*, *advaitam*—it is this and nothing more.

“Two notes have been struck from this *Āśram*. one of the universe, the other of the soul of man. This shrine is situated at the confluence of the streams of these two notes. Both of these notes are very ancient and ever new. The silent *mantra* which this our sky is continually repeating is the same which our forefathers received into the depths of their hearts many centuries ago, standing silently on the flat fields of Northern India. Our forest-dwelling ancestors, too, on that day, when they began building their first huts along the banks of the Sarasvatī, saw the same sacred mastery of art by which the two sisters, light and shade, steeped in the leafy silence of the wood, have created on the surface of the earth a mantle of the gods. It is the same sky, the same world of shadows, the same restlessness to express the indescribable with which they heard all space resound; for this reason our wise forefathers called the firmament *krandasi* (‘roaring’).

“How ancient is the message which is again being

uttered here from the lips of men· 'Pitā no 'si, pitā no bodhi, namas te 'stu' ('You are our father, be our father, reverence to you'). How simple, significant and ancient are these words! The language in which this message was first expressed is no longer spoken, but these words are full of faith and devotion, confidence, earnestness and humility even to-day. In these very few words are concentrated the eternal hope and consolation and prayer of man.

"From how very remote time again come these very short and yet great words *satyam, jñānam, anantam brahma*! The civilization of modern times was then hidden in the womb of barbarism, it was not even born. But the realization of the infinite has not yet exhausted this statement.

"Even with the telescope of history, we cannot clearly discern the picture of the day when from the lips of men first issued the great prayer *Asato mā sad gamaya, tamaso mā jyotiḥ gamaya, mrityor māmṛitam gamaya* (Out of untruth lead me to truth, out of darkness lead me to light, out of death lead me to eternity). And yet in this ancient prayer is contained in its entirety all the longing of the soul of men.

"On one side therefore there is this ancient sky, this ancient light and the ever-returning newness of the manifestation of age-old life in nature, on the other side there is the undying, timeless message of the mind of men, and the synthesis of these two is this Śāntiniketan Āśram.

"That we should look for the universal in the individual soul, for the creator of the world in the world, are

statements so extremely obvious that at first sight it would appear needless to make so much fuss and confusion over them. But this has happened again and again in the history of mankind. Because men are naturally prone to go to extremes, it is difficult to determine how far they would go if the attraction of the central point ceased. The nature of man makes external things bigger and more complex every day, so that at last a time comes when it becomes most difficult for him to find their essence and their natural characteristics, and he no longer searches for it, he forgets all about it, and does not realize that it really exists, he recognizes external things as the only reality and loses faith in everything else.

“On the day of the fair a little child wanders about holding his mother’s hand, but because his mind is taken up by his surroundings he gives up that hold and then in the crowd and noise is carried further and further away from her. At last he remembers nothing of his mother. The external objects which he sees occupy his heart and assume large proportions in his eyes. His mother, who is dearer to him than anything else, becomes an extremely hazy object and seems to be at a great distance. At last it so happens that to find his own mother becomes for the child the most difficult task imaginable. The same thing happens to us.

“At such times, men come into the world to rediscover the natural, immanent, essential verities. It is one of the wonders of God that he allows to be made difficult that which is easiest—he allows to be lost that which is nearest to us, lest we lose sight of it because it is so easy, and we do not realize its whole importance unless we

have to search for it. When it is regained and somebody suddenly claps his hands and shouts 'Here, it is here', we come running and ask 'where is it?' 'Here in our innermost heart and in our innermost soul' God dwells all the time there where we need him most, it is only we who sought far afield for this simple truth. that in order to search and find him, who very truly exists, it is necessary for us to suffer so much pain.

"Mankind has always had to look up to its great men in order to regain its right to the eternal sky and the eternal light by tearing asunder the complex net which it itself has woven. Some have engaged in this activity in the realm of religion or of knowledge or of practical life. They come into this world to tear the veil of the moment from things which belong to eternity. When mankind lost its way in the wilderness of beliefs that salvation is obtained by the performance of particular ceremonies and the recitation of particular *mantras* at particular places, Buddha came to discover and preach this very simple truth that salvation is obtained only by self-sacrifice, compassion for all created beings, the victory over all desire, and not by going to particular places, by bathing in particular waters, by sacrificing to fire or by uttering *mantras*. This statement appears to be extremely simple, but to find it out a prince had to leave his kingdom and wander about in forests and streets, so difficult did it become in the hands of men. When the rules of the Pharisees compelled the Jews to regard the observance of external rites as a religion, at a time when they considered it the special desire of God that they should hate those who confessed other

faiths and should avoid all intercourse with them, at a time when observance of the Jewish religion became the exclusive property of the Jewish race, Jesus came to proclaim this extremely simple truth. that religion is a matter of the heart, that God is the heart's treasure, that virtue and vice are not judged according to formal, artificial rules, that all men are the sons of God, that religion is hateless love of men and faithful devotion to God, that externality deadens the soul and that life is to be obtained through the essential things of the soul. This statement is so extremely simple that every man has to admit its truth at once. And yet in all countries men made this thing so difficult that because of it Jesus had to do penance in the wilderness and to accept the humiliating punishment of death on the cross.

"Mohammed too had to do the same. Men's moral standards had become varied and diffuse. He turned men's eyes on their own hearts and on the immortality of the individual. It was not easy for him to do this, for its sake he had to tread a difficult and dangerous path all his life—the enmity of all around him surged up like a stormy sea and he was continually being attacked. To perceive clearly and to redeem that which is really natural for mankind, that which is the simple truth, men who are endowed with the highest powers are required.

"I have named the three great men who ascended to the highest puissance in the realm of religion and who liberated religion from the narrow limits of country, race and custom and put it within the reach of humanity of all countries and ages like the light of the sun, the

rain and the clouds. In the history of mankind they have written with their own lives the message that the essence of religion is universal, that the customary images, customs or scriptures of any particular country cannot confine it within artificial bounds. We can no longer fail to recognize who the men are, who, in different countries and at different times, have at God's command lit the lamp of their lives to lead us on the path of truth, we can realize it clearly from their example. For some this lamp may have been small, for some great; the light of the lamp of some may have reached to far horizons, others may have guided the footsteps of nearby wayfarers, but it is no longer difficult to recognize this flame "

In November 1902 Rabindranath's wife Mrinalinidebi died. The poet was left alone and his children still required considerable maternal care and help. Under the burden of this cruel fate he wrote two series of family lyrics *Smaran* ("In Memoriam") and *Śiśu* ("The Child"), in the first he wished to sing away his sorrow in mournful memories of his dead wife, in the second he betrayed an unusual depth of paternal feeling. The near future held a fresh sorrow in store for him: his eldest daughter was consumptive and for her sake he went from Śantiniketan to Almora in the Himalayas. But all his care was in vain. She died in 1904. And three years later his youngest son died.

Smaran contains fragile memorial lyrics. He wished to find consolation in them in intimate memories of his dead wife, and to sing away the tears of his pain,

Loftier Themes

which would not allow him to forget her. His heart, weighed down by pain, is not prepared to meet a morning full of joy. In another poem he confesses that he finds memories of his wife in a thousand trifles, in letters which she jealously kept, in thoughts of the beauty which came into his house with her, and in thoughts of her daily work in the house. He begs to be allowed to forget his pain, and that the beauty which the Creator thought of on that cruel day when He summoned her to him should be awakened. These poems are simple in expression, but betray great depth of feeling, as for example the second in the book

“When she still lived, then every gift
She gave me, Lord, I could repay.
That time will never come again.
Her night is morning now.
You took her in your arms, O Lord,
And at your feet to-day I lay the gifts
That I prepared for her erstwhile.
For every wrong to her,
For every fault of mine,
I must beg pardon of you, Lord, to-day.
The blooms of gratitude and love
Which she no longer can receive
I bring to you to-day, O Lord,
Though they were meant for her.”

✓ His pain is without cries of despair and hopelessness, without searing words. Naturally for despair and hopelessness are negations against which the poet has struggled

all his life; and death, although a painful transition, merely lifts the veil leading to a new life. Equally misplaced are the reproaches of those Indian critics who in these memories of his mourning, which are muted by his philosophy, see a lack of poetic power.

His wife's death compelled him to the reflection that one evening the sun will bid a last farewell to him, too, and that his days, too, will end in darkness. He prayed that he might learn, before he goes, why the earth summoned him to its arms, why the quiet of the night spoke to him of the stars and why the kisses of the daylight transformed his thoughts into flowers, he begs the favour that he may pause at his last verse and complete its music, before his life merges into the life of the universe, when he will learn his final destiny.

Few collections of poems are conceived in so uniform a tone as *Sísú*, a collection of poems about children, unique in the literature of the world, which contains uncounted wealth of tenderness. It is remarkable that the reader's interest, although the theme but for unimportant variations is constantly the same, increases rather than decreases. The poet can look through the eyes of a father just as well as through the eyes of a child, he understands the child mind so well, has so much comprehension for the small sorrows and great joys of childhood, is at home in jokes and games as though he could not wonder enough at the playful and naive childish being, which is unaware of its value and completely void of care. In the introductory poem he speaks in antitheses of childhood's freedom from care. Some children are playing on the shore of infinite worlds.

Loftier Themes

The water swells over bottomless depths and the children embark on it in ridiculous little boats. Men toil for treasures, divers bring pearls out of the depths of the sea, the children play with pebbles. A storm rages in the sky, ships are wrecked by the beating of the waves, death threatens on all sides—and the children go on playing. "Whence have I come, where did you find me?" a child asks. Its mother answers with a smile which conceals a tear that the child was born like a desire in her heart, that it was already among the dolls with which she played as a child, that when her heart blossomed the child was the odour of its flowers, that it was born in the soft tenderness of her young body like the glow on the sky before sunrise, that it lived not only in her life, but in the life of her own mother too, that it lived in the life of the flowers and finally anchored in the joyous harbour of her heart, that before it belonged to all, but now, by a miracle, it is hers alone.

The second part of the book consists of poems describing children's games and children's fancies which the poet conceives with extraordinary inventiveness, demonstrating once more what a depth of feeling lies in a child's attitude to its surroundings and particularly to its mother. One of the poems describes the longing of children of all ages and all countries to go far away abroad and to bring their mothers hidden treasure. In another poem the child asks whether its mother understands its father when he recites to her what he has written, are not mother's tales quite different, easy to understand and beautiful? Father has evidently forgotten already the tales his mother used to tell him. In the

Loftier Themes

poem *Lukochuri* ("Hide and Seek") the child would like to play with its mother:

"Suppose I became a *chāmpā* flower, just for fun, and grew on a branch high up that tree, and shook in the wind with laughter and danced upon the newly-budded leaves, would you know me, mother? You would call, 'Baby, where are you?' And I should laugh to myself and keep quite quiet

I should slyly open my petals and watch you at your work. When after your bath, with wet hair spread on your shoulders, you walked through the shadow of the *chāmpā* tree to the little court where you say your prayers, you would notice the scent of the flower, but not know that it came from me

When after the midday meal you sat at the window reading *Ramayana*, and the tree's shadow fell over your hair and your lap, I should fling my wee little shadow on to the page of your book, just where you were reading. But would you guess that it was the tiny shadow of your little child?

When in the evening you went to the cowshed with the lighted lamp in your hand, I should suddenly drop on to the earth again and be your own baby once more, and beg you to tell me a story. 'Where have you been, you naughty child?' 'I won't tell you, mother.' That's what you and I would say then."

(Translated by the poet himself in *The Crescent Moon*. Macmillan & Co., London)

As early as 1885 his collected poems were published, and the second edition of his poetic work in thirteen

volumes was edited in 1903 by Mohitchandra Sen. He grouped the poems according to their theme, but in so doing of course destroyed the picture of the poet's development. The poet prefaced every volume with a dedication; in 1904 these poetical dedications, with other poems, were published. This was the origin of *Utsarga* ("Dedications"). The collection is necessarily lacking in homogeneity. Among poetical envoys and lofty apostrophes of the Himalayas, the king of mountains, there are poems which are characteristic of the unrest of his mind at the time, like the seventh poem in the collection.

"I ran as a musk-deer runs in the shadow of the forest
mad with his own perfume.

The night is the night of mid-May, the breeze is the
breeze of the south

I lose my way and I wander, I seek what I cannot
get, I get what I do not seek

From my heart comes out and dances the image of
my own desire

The gleaming vision flits on

I try to clasp it firmly, it eludes me and leads me
astray.

I seek what I cannot get, I get what I do not seek."

(Translated by the poet himself in *The Gardener*,
No. 15. Macmillan & Co., London.)

The poet is full of fear lest his life's day should pass without fruit. That this will not be the case he assures himself in the following simile (No 9). "In the heart of the bud the scent laments that it is imprisoned in the petals of the flower. 'Alas, time is flying, Spring is

vanishing.' 'Have no fear, do not worry, the blossom will open, the bonds will loosen, all your desires will be satisfied, you will live your life to the full. And Spring will not yet be over'."

It is only natural that Tagore, as a confirmed advocate of the positive in life, was led from the historical novel, cultivated with such success by Bankimchandra, to the social novel. He describes the life of the Bengali middle classes in *Chokher bālī* ("Eyesore"), an unassuming novel in which he did not seek to solve the profound mysteries of life, but merely to show how complicated are the feelings of a human heart, particularly the feelings of the heart of a Bengali woman. The heroine of the novel, the noble-minded Binodini, furnishes only another example of the great self-denial of which an Indian woman is capable, a self-denial which is stressed again and again in his short stories.

Only a year later (in 1904) he published a new novel, more firmly constructed and better worked out: *Naukā-dubī* ("The Wreck")

A lawyer, Rameś, saw during his studies at Calcutta Hemnalini, a charming and well-educated girl, daughter of Annadababu, and felt more and more distinctly that he had fallen in love with the beautiful Hemnalini. At this point Brajmohan, Rameś' father, came to Calcutta. Rameś wished to confess to his father, but Brajmohan prepared everything for departure, and took his son home with him. It turned out that Brajmohan wished to marry his son to Suśila, a daughter of his former friend, who had died leaving a widow and child without resources. In his dilemma Rameś admitted to his father

that he loved Hemnalini. Brajmohan asked him whether he had already made all arrangements with her relations, and on being told that he had not, insisted upon his son's marriage to Suśila. Rameś did not know Suśila, but was of the opinion that, like her mother, she would make a good wife. Seeing no alternative, he submitted to his father's will and proceeded with him to the distant village, where Suśila's relations lived. After the wedding ceremony, during which Rameś did not even look at his wife's face, they went, according to the custom of the richer classes in that part, for a trip on the river, in hired boats. Rameś was not in the same boat as his wife. In the evening a whirlwind surprised them on the river, overturning everything in its path. In a moment the unfortunate boats were destroyed. When Rameś regained consciousness he noticed that he had been thrown up on a sandbank. He looked to see whether he could find any of his relations and friends. Finally, far from the place where he was thrown on land, he noticed a maiden dressed in the purple wedding robe, and after long efforts succeeded in reviving her. He called out his father's name and searched for him in the moonlight, but no one answered. They spent the night on the sand bank, not until then did he notice that his wife was in reality only a child. When Rameś took her home he started to doubt whether the maiden whom he had saved was really his wife, after three months this doubt was transformed into a certainty: the maiden was called Kamala and was not Rameś' wife, she was married on the same day as Rameś, to a man whom she, too, did not know. For an Indian this presents no psychological

improbability, although a European would find it strange. According to Indian custom, when a marriage is concluded and during the wedding ceremonies the bridegroom may not know his bride's face.

At this point the author's analytical work begins. Should Rameś put away the innocent girl who thinks that he is her husband, an orphan, tell her the truth and destroy her peace of mind? Would any man marry a girl who had spent so long a time under his roof? He decided not to do so for the time being, to devote all his energies to searching for her husband, and not to tell Kamala the truth until he has found him. His investigations might well be carried out in Calcutta, whither, moreover, his sorrowing heart urged him. He therefore left for Calcutta, where he placed Kamala into a girls' school.

In Calcutta he met Annadababu, who invited him to his home. Was it Rameś' duty to consider himself a married man? His love for Hemnalini was deep, and he would like to marry her. In the meantime Jogendra, Hemnalini's brother and his friend, learned that in some sort of home there was a girl who called herself Rameś' wife. Hemnalini refused to believe the news and fainted; Jogendra himself, Rameś' best friend, forbade him to come to their house any longer. Rameś defended himself, saying that he wished to tell the whole truth after his marriage to Hemnalini. Rameś' marriage to Hemnalini was prevented and Rameś, who had no explanation to give to Hemnalini, left Calcutta in order to search still more strenuously for Kamala's husband. He himself felt crushed, and pondered over the fantastic story

of his exchange of wives and the effect it would have on Kamala if he told her the whole truth. He recognized that the best course would be to conceal the true state of affairs.

But an unsettled state of mind is reflected in a man's character. Rameś fought a hard struggle. He had no hope of being loved by Hemnalini, and everything tended to bring him nearer and nearer to Kamala. Could he marry her? In the meantime, however, Kamala herself had changed. Formerly a timid girl, she became gradually more and more independent and stronger; when she happened to learn that the man whom up till then she had considered to be her husband was not married to her at all she did not hesitate to leave him. After long sufferings she found her real husband, Nalinaksh, a doctor, who was quite different from Rameś, strong and sincere. The author describes another mental process: the gradual growth of love between Kamala and Nalinaksh.

The contrast ~~between~~ the characters is artistically drawn and ~~betrays~~ the hand of a master. This applies not only to the principal pairs, Rameś and Nalinaksh, Kamala and Hemnalini, Annadababu and Kshemankari, mother of Nalinaksh, but also to the minor characters. Everything is carefully constructed, one event arising naturally out of another. *The Wreck* may be considered one of Tagore's best novels. It is homogeneous, and the author does not succumb to the temptation of harmful diffuseness. His solutions of urgent social problems betray a deep moral conviction. A sorrowful patriot, the poet derived the problems he discusses from the

vital troubles of his country, the novel is full of action, and the human interest is very powerful. The author does not seek brilliant effects or stirring scenes, but imparts to his readers great confidence in life, and the higher the ethical outlook of his characters the greater it becomes.

In January 1905 his father, Debendranath, died. In the shade of the two mighty trees at Śantiniketan under which the noble philosopher was wont to meditate, his son had a memorial stone erected. Its inscription proclaims Debendranath's unswerving faith in one God, whom he worshipped and for whom he struggled during his whole long and fruitful life.

He is the refuge of my life,
The joy of my heart,
The peace of my soul.

From this time dates a collection of about fifty poems, some of which are in close affinity to the old religious lyrics of Kabir, the influence of Kabir's religious poetry on Tagore is witnessed by the fact that later (in 1921) he himself edited a selection of these poems for the English-speaking public. Other poems in this collection show distinct traces of a further change in his poetical development, which later found external and internal expression in the songs in *Gītāñjali*. The symbolic title *Kheyā* ("The Crossing") shows that the poet was already conscious of this change. His former passionate accents are muted, his work is dreamy and as if wiser. The poet desires a profounder, more real life. His goal is firmly

set and the path to it is known, but the pilgrim must purify his heart in order to be prepared for the ultimate festive encounter. For this reason the poems of this collection may almost be said to have a festive character. Here, for example, is the poem *The Play*

“I am like a remnant of a cloud of Autumn uselessly roaming in the sky, O my sun ever-glorious! Thy touch has not yet melted my vapour, making me one with thy light and thus I count months and years separated from thee.

If this be thy wish and if this be thy play, then take this fleeting emptiness of mine, paint it with colours, gild it with gold, float it on the wanton wind and spread it in varied wonders.

And again when it shall be thy wish to end this play at night, I shall melt and vanish away in the dark, or it may be in a smile of the white morning, in a coolness of purity transparent.”

(Translated by the poet himself for the English edition of *Gītāñjali*, No 80 Macmillan & Co, London)

Man is a captive in this world, and the bonds which bind him to it he forged himself. “I thought that my power will put the whole world in bonds and that I myself will be freed. So I worked day and night, striking mighty blows, at the chain I was forging, and hardened it in many fires. When my work was finished I saw that I was held fast in its clasp.” In the struggle of this world God wants not weakness, but creative work. “O Lord of my heart, there will be no more waiting

for me nor lamenting in corners, no diffidence nor stealthy actions You have adorned me with a sword. I no longer need the attire of a doll ”

Among the religious songs we find here and there a piece of lyrical description or a simple picture, like this paraphrase of a Buddhist *motif* in the poem *At the Well*

“I asked nothing from thee, I uttered not my name to thine ear When thou tookest thy leave I stood silent, I was alone by the well where the shadow of the tree fell aslant, and the women had gone home with their brown earthen pitchers full to the brim. They called me and shouted, ‘Come with us, the morning is wearing on to noon ’ But I languidly lingered awhile, lost in the midst of vague musings

I heard not thy steps as thou camest Thine eyes were sad when they fell on me, thy voice was tired as thou spokest low—‘Ah, I am a thirsty traveller.’ I started up from my daydreams and poured water from my jar on thine joined palms The leaves rustled overhead, the cuckoo sang from the unseen dark; and perfume of *bāblā* flowers came from the bend of the road.

I stood speechless with shame when my name thou didst ask Indeed, what had I done for thee to keep me in remembrance? But the memory that I could give water to thee to allay thy thirst will cling to my heart and enfold it in sweetness The morning hour is late, the bird sings in weary notes, *nim* leaves rustle overhead and I sit and think and think ”

(Translated by the poet himself for the English edition of *Gītāñjali*, No 54 Macmillan & Co , London)

Not only as a poet, but also as an educationalist and patriot, Tagore attached very great importance to language, its structure, melodiousness and the correct pronunciation of the mother tongue, which must not be neglected, he says, for "its mother tongue is to youth what a mother's milk is to a child—only by following the stream of one's mother tongue can one get to the sea of universal human culture" Between the years 1892 and 1902 he wrote (originally for periodicals, mainly *Sādhana* and *Bhāratī*) several articles on language, which were collected and published under the title of *Śabdatattva* ("The Theory of Words") I am quoting that part of this book which deals with the pronunciation of the vowel "a," which sometimes has the value of a sound "o." The author tries to establish rules for this change. It should be mentioned that Tagore here takes standard the pronunciation adopted in Calcutta, for as the Czech reformer John Huss took the Prague dialect as the basis for his written language, so Tagore, in his writings introduced the use of the dialect of the capital town of the province, the centre of culture and trade, the "Bengali Greenwich", this course had a fruitful influence on the development of literary Bengali

"The vowel *a* or a syllable with a final *a* is sometimes pronounced *o*, as in *atī*, *kalu*, *gharī*, *kalya*, *maru*, *daksha*, etc.; the *o* sound assumed by *a* in such cases may be called short *o*.

I have noticed that *a* takes the value of *o* only in certain places, for this change the following rules may be established

Rule 1 *a* succeeded by *i* (short or long) or *u* (short or long) or by a syllable containing a consonant group and ending in *i* or *u* is pronounced *o*, for example *agni*, *agrim*, *kapi*, *taru*, *anguli*, *adhimā*, *hanu*

Rule 2 *a* has the value of *o* when succeeded by a consonant with *ya*. This rule is in a way contained in the first, for *ya* is nothing else but a combination of *i* and *a*, e.g. *ganya*, *dantya*, *labhya*, etc. Notice the difference between the pronunciation of these two words 'danta' and 'dantya na'

Rule 3 *a* succeeded by *ksh* assumes the value of *o*, for example in *aksha*, *kaksha*, *laksha*, *paksha*, etc.; the pronunciation of *ksh* was perhaps at one time something like *i* and therefore this combination is called *kshya*. People in Eastern Bengal pronounce a *y* after *ksh*, and even insert a faint *i* before *ksh*, in the Calcutta district people say 'laksha tākā,' but in the east they say 'lakshya tākā'

Rule 4 in verbs *a* sometimes takes the value of *o*, as in *ha'le*, *kar'le*, *pa'la*, *ma'la*, etc., which means that if an *i* following *a* was somewhere suppressed in the process of abbreviation, the preceding *a* should be pronounced *o*, *ha'le* is abbreviated from 'haile,' *kar'le* from 'karile,' *pa'la* from 'padila,' *ma'la* from 'manila,' *ka're* is the abbreviation of 'kanyā' and therefore the vowel sound *o* is added to *k*, but 'kare' as a perfective verb remains unchanged, because there is no *i* in the word 'kare' and never was one

Rule 5 *a* followed by a syllable ending in *r* also assumes the value of *o*, for example, *kartrk*, *bhartr masrn*, *yakrt*, *bhakttrtā*, etc., the reason for this is quite evident in Bengali the vocal *r* is pronounced *ri*

Rule 6 It is not clear whether this can be described as a rule or the exception to a rule. If in two-syllable words *a* is followed by a dental or cerebral *n*, it assumes the value of *o*, as, for example, in *ban(a)*, *dhan(a)*, *ian(a)*, *man(a)*, *man(a)*, *pan(a)*, *kshan(a)*, the pronunciation of the word 'ghana' is not fixed. Some people say 'ghano dudh,' others 'ghono dudh.' Only the words 'gana' and 'rana' are not governed by this rule. This rule does not affect words of three or more syllables, such as *kanak(a)*, *ganak(a)*, *san(a)san(a)*, *kan(a)kan(a)*. This rule also does not apply to words in which three syllables have been shortened to two, e.g. 'ka'n(a)' is abbreviated from 'kahen(a),' 'ha'n(a)' from 'hayen(a)', etc. However this may be, this sixth rule is not very clear.

Rule 7: I have remarked in rule four that *a* assumes the value of *o* when the succeeding *i* is suppressed in the process of abbreviation, where *u* has been suppressed in the process of abbreviation, the preceding *a* should also be pronounced as *o*, for example instead of 'haun' we have 'ha'n,' instead of 'raun' 'ra'n,' instead of 'kaun' we have 'ka'n,' etc.

Rule 8 Where *a* is combined with a group of consonants ending in *r*, it takes the value of *o*, as in 'āban, bhram, bhraman, graha, braja, trasta, pramān, pratāp, etc., but when followed by *y* it remains unchanged, as in *kra*y, *tr*ay, *ś*ray."

A second edition of this book was published in 1936 under the title of *Bāṅglā śabdātattva*, considerably enlarged and preceded by an interesting preface.

Lord Curzon (Viceroy 1899-1905) in the last year of his office separated the eastern part of Bengal with

Assam from the rest of the country. The proclamation of this separation ruffled the surface of Bengali public opinion, for the Hindus were convinced that the only reason for the partition of Bengal was to weaken the growing nationalist movement and to provide a counterweight to Bengal in the shape of a new province with a Mohammedan majority. The first governor of Eastern Bengal, B. Fuller, himself confirmed them in this opinion, for, referring to the fact that Eastern Bengal has two different classes, one Hindu, the other Mohammedan, he said that he has two wives, a Hindu and a Mohammedan, but that the Mohammedan is his favourite.

For some time Bengal was full of excitement and unrest. Even beyond the boundaries of the province meetings were held to protest against the action of the Anglo-Indian government. In Benares, too, at the session of the "All-Indian Congress" in 1905, it was noticeable that the atmosphere differed considerably from that of the first session twenty years previously. The dissatisfaction, which was fed from several sources, from the intellectual disunion of the younger generation, the oppression of nationalism and the economic depression, manifested itself openly. India's connection with Great Britain was at this time still considered as being to India's advantage, but the manner in which India was ruled was declared to be a national misfortune. Bengal answered the partition by an intensified boycott of British goods, and the expulsion of students from the State colleges for merely singing the national anthem *Bande mātaram* ("Be greeted, O mother"), which was taken from Bankimchandra's novel *Ānandamath*, by the

establishment of a National College. Bengal, which under the influence of the Baishnaba movement had always been highly religious, exchanged its religious fervour for nationalist fervour. The movement grew and needed a leader Rabindranath, full of patriotic enthusiasm, accepted the leadership. Full of plans of action, he thought that the opportunity for the constructive work of which he had dreamed so long had come, and that he would be able to prove his faith in life by deeds, and by deeds to confirm his confidence in the future of his country. He threw himself passionately into the struggle for what he considered to be just. He held meetings at which he cast a spell over his hearers by the magic of his words, organized the national struggle and composed the patriotic songs which resounded all over Bengal at that time. In a public lecture on Britain's imperialistic policy he instructed the students how to help to organize the country districts. "The downtrodden and the despised who have become callous to insults and oblivious of even the rights of their humanity must be taught the meaning of the word 'brother'. Teach them to be strong and to protect themselves, for that is the only way. Take, each of you, charge of some village and organize it. Educate the villagers and show them how to put forward their united strength. Look not for fame or praise in this undertaking. Do not expect even the gratitude of those for whom you would give your life, but be prepared rather for their opposition."

In an article on constructive nationalism, "*Svadeśīsamāj*," which appeared in *Bangadarśan* in 1906 he

wrote of the necessity for the internal reorganization of the Indian village, which should bring India's freedom within its grasp. Some years before Gandhi he proclaimed the need for cottage industries to help to remove the poverty of the country districts. But it is not sufficient, he said, merely to do away with the poverty of the country districts, it is necessary to compel the peasant to convince himself that he himself must collaborate, for only in this way will the root of the evil be removed. It is necessary to reduce the senseless extravagance at private and public ceremonies (for example, weddings), and to establish groups of voluntary workers, to strive for an understanding between the Hindus and Moham-medans, to compel the peasants to construct roads, repair the water-tanks and to strive in every way to realize their responsibility in their local administration, in this way, he said, they will better be able to resist the British advance.

These activities of his stirred up great patriotic fervour in Bengal and a strong regional patriotism—his banners were held proudly aloft. Most decidedly, however, he opposed empty playing at patriotism. In one of his letters he said that at that time several students came to him and promised that they would immediately leave school if he wished them to do so. He emphatically refused and the students left, angered and doubting the sincerity of his patriotism. But Tagore's patriotism was profounder than these young firebrands could grasp. His patriotism desired not only freedom for his nation, but also its liberation from the bonds of idleness and cowardice, of ignorance and selfishness, superstition and

retrogression, shallow observation of the letter rather than the spirit and the unjustified supremacy of one social class, which in his opinion are just as heavy a burden as that of the foreign yoke. These internal enemies must be overcome and the lost intellectual provinces regained. Liberation from within is necessary, born of self-sacrifice, self-purification and self-control. But this does not mean that an ascetic life is necessary. In an article entitled "The Meaning of Beauty," written in 1907, he said expressly that the goal of the present is not direction of life by the rules of asceticism, but complete development of personality. He emphasized that even art must have a sound contact with life. In Brahma-samaj, too, he demanded the abolition of all caste prejudices, and that even a member of the lowest caste might become a priest, as Keśab demanded almost fifty years before. But at that time Tagore's father opposed Keśab, and in the end the conflict led to a schism. Now the son supported the humane and just claim, and his will was respected, though not for long.

He disbelieved in violent methods, saying that they are not in harmony with the spirit of Indian history. He wanted not a political, but a social revolution. He recognized, however, the philosophy of Bhagavadgita, and like President Masaryk of Czechoslovakia maintained that it is sometimes necessary to resort to force, but said that force should be used in the cause of truth, without anger and without hatred. His faith in man was so great that he even proposed that one man should be appointed leader and have complete power in the movement, saying that only in this way could proper discipline

be maintained. He disagreed with the manner in which the boycott of British goods was conducted and rejected in principle the boycott of foreign goods. Later on, in a novel entitled *Ghare-bāire* ("The Home and the World") he deals with this exciting period, and it is certainly his opinion which is proclaimed by Nikhil; when the students come to Nikhil and ask that foreign goods should not be allowed in the bazaars, he answers that the loss would be borne by the unfortunate merchants and their customers. When the students object that losses must be risked for the sake of the country he answers that the country does not mean the land but the people. He asks them, further, if they have ever thought whether they act justly in commanding the poor merchants, who are so dependent upon a few copper coins, to destroy their wares, and when they use force and molestation if the unfortunate men do not obey their orders.

Just as, a hundred years before, the young Indian generation had gone to the extreme of considering everything Indian worthless, so now an exaggerated reaction set in. The waves of patriotism ran high, and his wise and prudent advice found no listeners. Excess due to patriotic tension, which found a vent in terrorism, undermining all respect for law, induced the poet to withdraw from public politics in 1908, he considered that in retirement he could continue to serve the interests of his country against terrorism, with his pen alone. It was Buddha who conquered the world, he said, not Alexander. This opinion is closely allied to the conclusion drawn in Masaryk's *The Making of a State*, that

Czechoslovakia's programme is Christ, not Caesar. At that time nationalist India saw in his termination of political activities a betrayal. Falsely. Just as falsely he was mistrusted by governmental circles at this time, from whom, after all, more psychological understanding for his work might have been expected. It was Rabindranath Tagore, the lover of his native soil, but at the same time the prudent judge of the new conditions who, trusting profoundly in a just settlement of conditions in India, pointed out that terrorism might bring the country into a situation from which it would be hard to find a way out. Some years later the apostle of universal friendship and collaboration writes in *Gītāñjali* (No 124) with truly Indian conciliatoriness, holding out his hand in a friendly gesture:

“On that day when the valiant warriors returned to the hall of their master, where did they hide their great strength? Bows, arrows and swords seem to have disappeared, a smile of peace has blossomed and brought fruits of victory, on that day when they returned to the hall of their master.”

This political intermezzo brought no bitterness into his work. His heart was capable only of giving and thanking, never of hating or reproaching. He was man enough to withdraw from public politics when he became aware that his mission did not lie there. He retired to Śantiniketan and compensated himself for his disappointment by increased literary activity. This is the explanation for the fact that his political disappoint-

ment was no failure, for the decade which followed is one of the most fertile periods of his life and gave the world undying literary fruit.

He first wrote some prose plays with insertions of lyrical verse.

Śāradotsab ("Autumn Festival") is a country *jātrā*. The poet says in his preface that the play was written for production by the pupils of his school at Śantiniketan for the autumn festival in 1908. It is one unceasing hymn to the life which throbs around us in nature and is a summons to us, too, to pay our debt by toil and self-sacrifice. Fourteen years later, in 1922, he returned to this theme and considerably extended the play

On the day of the Autumn festival the boys sing for joy that the day of the festival has come. The cantankerous and usurious moneylender Lakshēśvar drives them away. An old man takes their part and tells Lakshēśvar to look around him at all the unrestraining work which is going on in nature, how all things daily pay their debts to their creator, and summons him to allow this thought to penetrate his idle heart. The boys, singing, go to the bank of the river. A hermit comes, and the boys hope that a man who has devoted his life to complete self-denial in the heart of the country will have more understanding for their rejoicing than the good old man or Lakshēśvar the usurer. Strangely enough the hermit gladly and promptly agrees and joins in the eternal rhythm of give and take. It is Bijayaditya, the king of that province, in disguise; this becomes known when the unassuming play reaches its climax.

The play, the scene of which is laid in the open

country, as was the case in the *jātrās*, is interspaced with choruses of boys and songs by individual characters.

It has already been said that the novel *Bauthākurānir hāt*, which describes the intrigues of the courtiers at the court of King Pratapaditya of Jaśohar, has a dramatic course. In the poet's conception of the various characters in the novel there are dramatic elements the domineering, proud King Pratapaditya, who in conversation with his minister expresses the opinion that he is not only entitled but actually under an obligation to remove anyone who interferes with his plans, the intriguing Rukmini, the good and moderate Basantaray (an historical character), the just Prince Udayaditya who suffers sorely under his father's mistrust, Surama, the loving and beloved wife of Udayaditya, and the indecisive Bibha. For this reason *Prāyaścitta* ("Atonement"), the dramatization of this novel, is a true drama. Family strife, individual treachery, an intriguing jester—Shakespearean elements—do not surprise us in the work of Tagore, who after all studied this dramatist. His treatment of it is interesting for the additional reason that the play is not conceived as showing the reward for moral integrity, but rather as a struggle between the central power and the nascent nationalist idea.

In the drama *Rājā* (published in English under the title *The King of the Dark Chamber*), written in 1910, the dramatic tension is interrupted by meditations and the uncertainty of the reader or spectator as to the meaning of the play.

A number of foreign pilgrims come to a festival in the kingdom of the "Great King" (this may mean the

Great Truth), who is invisible to his people and in this way arouses their curiosity. A group of his subjects discusses the meaning of this mystery. Is the king perhaps hideous? They meet an old man with a troop of boys. The old man assures them that the whole country is full of the king throughout. He himself is treading a path which certainly leads to him. The subjects rejoice at the news that their king is at last no longer going to conceal himself from them and that he is coming, but the approaching "king" Subarna, who dazzles them with his splendour, is only a puppet. Queen Sudarśana, who longs to see her husband, the king of the dark chamber, also allows herself to be deceived by the false king, and hands him her wreath, but afterwards falters under the burden of her shame. Her chambermaid, Surangama, warned her that the only way to seek the king was through her heart's love. The king, too, when the queen desires to see him as she sees trees, birds, stones and the ground, tells her that she can see him from the palace tower walking among the people outside the palace under the Spring moon. In the end the queen, after suffering pain and despair, finds her way to him by service. In her humiliation the Great King comes down to her and the queen, having discovered him within herself, at last finds open the door of the dark chamber which until then has always been her fate.

The entire play contains elements of mystery, and there is a peculiar charm about it, although neither the characters nor the plot is very clear. In compensation, the play reflects clearly the characters' deep longing for purification.

In the loneliness of Śantiniketan the poet found an

untroubled outlook. He meditated profoundly over the crisis of modern Bengali life and echoed the ferment of the age, its current thoughts and the endeavours for social regeneration in educated Calcutta society in a philosophical and social novel *Gorā*, published in two volumes in 1910. The comparatively simple plot is enriched by the reflections of his own heart and the theories of the adherents of Brahmasamaj.

The advance of progress is irresistible, but all the more fanatically do the conservatives keep the old tradition. There is certainly no doubt that Tagore will be found on the side of progress, but the problem is where the boundary between the two camps is to be laid. Is it necessary to repudiate the entire old order, sanctified by the lives of our ancestors and by many centuries of observance, or may some part of it be retained to our future advantage? Tagore, who is of the opinion that not all customs are to be condemned, submits the orthodox opinion of his countrymen to a revision and indicates in this novel the right path for orthodoxy to follow. To heighten the contrast still further he chooses as fervent protagonist of the old traditions Gora, who, as is later shown, by a queer trick of fate was the son of Irish parents. There is no doubt that the author idealizes both sides, the tradition-lovers and the progressivists; for this reason some of his characters, whose allegiance is determined beforehand, do not develop. Further the novel also contains too much discussion. It is just this, however, which is typical of the Bengali intelligentsia, the *milieu* in which the story is placed. In the seemingly incoherent plot there is actually a firm unity, which is

concentrated in the person of Gora. Concealed behind this character, the author, after thorough introspection, defines his considered attitude to many of the vital problems of the younger generation, after a long pilgrimage and many discussions he is able to say:

"Can you follow what it is that I am trying to say? That which day and night I have been longing for but which I could not be, to-day at last I have become. To-day I am really an Indian. In me there is no longer any opposition between Hindu, Mussulman, and Christian. To-day every caste in India is my caste, the food of all is my food! Look here, I have wandered through many parts of Bengal, and have accepted hospitality in the lowest village homes—do not think that I have merely lectured before city audiences—but I have never been able to take my seat beside all equally—all these days I have been carrying about with me an unseen gulf of separation which I have never been able to cross over. Therefore in my mind there was a kind of void which I tried by various devices to ignore. I tried to make that emptiness look more beautiful by decorating it with all kinds of artistic work. Because I loved India better than life itself I was quite unable to bear the least criticism of that part of it which I had got to know. Now that I have been delivered from those fruitless attempts at inventing such useless decorations I feel, Paresu Babu, that I am alive again!" (Cf. *Gora*, p. 406 Macmillan & Co, London)

The prose play *Achalāyatan* ("The Immovable Stronghold") discusses a similar problem, with undaunted

courage opposing fossilized orthodoxy; this provoked the violent opposition of the traditionalists. It is a dramatic skit on orthodox Hindu society, which is described as an institution surrounded by high ramparts, cut off entirely from the outer world. He argues that an ancient truth, if it is maintained by force, becomes a lie. The inhabitants of Achalayatan observe the customs and ceremonies of the old order and learn interminable incantations. But in their midst an intellectual revolution is born: the young generation finds the old order onerous. Leader of the young rebels is Pañchak, who longs for liberation from the bonds of pettiness. He feels much more attracted to the Śoṇapamśus whom the orthodox inhabitants of Achalayatan consider untouchables and whom they have expelled outside the gates. Strangely enough an old teacher secretly sympathizes with the new trend. Everybody waits in uncertainty for the coming of the Great Master, but none except a handful of the eldest knows him. The Śoṇapamśus attack Achalayatan, whose gates give way, although they were considered impregnable, being under the protection of the gods and magic *mantras*. The orthodox citizens put the blame on the decline of the ancient faith and expel Pañchak and the old teacher from their midst to the quarter of the outcast Darbhaks. Both live contentedly the simple life of the Darbhaks. The Śoṇapamśus take Achalayatan and it turns out that their leader is the long-awaited "Great Master," who had to come in arms when all the paths by which he could approach it were closed to him. He asked the teacher to rebuild the

conquered Achalayatan in harmony with his message of freedom.

The poet was approaching the zenith of his life. His lips, which until this time had drunk of the overflowing cup of life's pleasure, seem to have drunk their fill, but did not fall silent. On the contrary, in 1909 and 1910 they gave forth a new melody. In his new poems he abandons the outer world and turns to the depths of his own heart, to find there a new estimate of man's relation to the world and to his God. In masterly verses, intensely musical, he communicates these thoughts to the reader, who experiences a foretaste of the communion of man and God. His poems contain no doubts of God, still less revolt against Him. Indian religious philosophy does not favour titanism. Tagore's God, although at moments of poetic ecstasy He is conceived anthropomorphically, does not make a bargain with the inhabitants of this world, but rather yields Himself lovingly. Ideologically, Tagore falls back on the rich heritage of the old Baishnaba poetry, but omits the character of Krishna and his beloved, Radha. It is for this reason that his charming religious poems, which were collected under the title *Gītāñjali* ("A Handful of Songs"), although full of the colouring of his native land, are so universal in their appeal. Technically, too, *Gītāñjali* is an accomplished work. His former variety of verse-forms narrows down to a few favourite types rich in rhyme and rhythm, some with a refrain. The delicacy of his language is remarkable. His message is clothed in expressions which have the charm of the un-

usual; and in the flowering garden of his religious poetry the connoisseur will find rare blooms of noble devotion.

The atmosphere of *Gītāñjali* is characterized by the very first verse of the first poem, in which Tagore says that he worships his Creator in the dust of the earth and that he wishes to drown all his pride in tears. For humility, devotion, and love are the key which determines the tone of this work. But his humility is manly, even bold, for he is aware of his great value.

“This is my prayer to Thee, my Lord—strike, strike at the roots of penury in my heart.

Give me the strength lightly to bear my joys and sorrows. Give me the strength to make my love fruitful in service.

Give me the strength never to disown the poor or bend my knees before insolent might.

Give me the strength to raise my mind high above daily trifles.

And give me the strength to surrender my strength to Thy will with love.”

(Translated by the poet himself for the English edition of *Gītāñjali*, No. 36. Macmillan & Co., London.)

The poet joyfully realizes that in a man's pain there is an inexhaustible treasure, which is his alone, whereas fame and wealth are a gift of God. He therefore wishes to offer God in humility a pearly chain of the tears of his days of sorrow (No. 10). In the happenings of this world, which is a temple hall, he begs that his songs, which sound the praise of God, may be granted a corner,

even a distant one, but he demands that this should not be denied to him:

“When the fresh breeze blows in the morning, and the sound of your song echoes the golden lute, let me, too, join in your song, Great King!”

The genuinely religious man does his part in the happenings and the toil of this world, in order to make it a better place for his God.

“Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads. Whom dost thou worship in this lonely, dark corner of a temple with doors all shut? Open thine eyes and see, thy God is not before thee.

He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the pathmaker is breaking stones. He is with them in sun and in shower, and His garment is covered with dust. Put off thy holy mantle and even like Him come down on the dusty soil

Deliverance? Where is this deliverance to be found? Our Master Himself has joyfully taken upon Him the bonds of creation, He is bound with us all for ever

Come out of thy meditations and leave aside thy flowers and incense. What harm is there if thy clothes become tattered and stained? Meet Him and stand by Him in toil and in sweat of thy brow.”

(Translated by the poet himself for the English edition of *Gītāñjali*, No. 11. Macmillan & Co., London.)

This poem may be compared with Kabir's poem 1. 13 (Kshatimohan Sen: *Kabir*, Bolpore, 1910)

“O my servant, where are you seeking Me? Behold, I am beside you. I am neither in the temple nor in the mosque, neither in Kaaba nor on Kailas. I am not in magnificent ceremonies nor in ascetic self-denial. If you are truly a seeker, you will see Me soon, the time will come when we shall meet. Kabir says: ‘O pilgrim, God is the breath of all breath.’ ”

Closely related to both is the Czech poet Wolker, who also seeks his God on earth, although his problem is a different one

“The Lord God came one day to me
Like a beggar, with bag and stick
I think He had slept in the hay,
I could smell it like the June fields
As He stood on the threshold and begged.
Now I walk the streets and look for my Lord God,
I know He passes here with bag and stick,
I know that one day I shall meet Him,
But it will not pain me any longer
For I’ve no more evil deeds
He’ll take me with Him. We will stand at corners
Cap in hand, the sun shining on our heads
‘We beg for love, O men of God—
—Open your hearts.’ ”

Reflective religious poetry, it is true, fills most of the leaves of *Gītāñjali*, but its course is frequently interrupted by a refreshing piece of descriptive lyric poetry or the sincere feeling of a patriotic song. In poem 107 he

Loftier Themes

summons the Indians and the British to co-operation in his native land "washed by the sea of great humanity," for India desires to be a mother to both. In poem 109 he reproaches India with not being a good mother to all her sons, and exhorts her to include in her loving embrace those of her children, too, who long lamented in misery. In a lecture entitled "East and West," which he held at about this time, he argued that the history of India is not merely the history of the Hindus and Mohammedans, for the British, too, contributed to the development of the country, so that the Indians are not even entitled to exclude them from participation in the regeneration of a new India. In another very effective poem (No. 9), he exhorts to constructive and undaunted work "From the ocean of joy the summons has sounded to-day: Away from the shore of inactivity. All hands to work! The boat is ready! Put in all the cargo! In spite of the waves the shore must be reached, even at the risk of our lives! From the ocean of joy the summons has sounded to-day!"

Just as, in *Naibedya*, he had written prophetic words shortly before the outbreak of the South-African War ("The sun is setting in clouds of blood to-day, at the close of the century, in a feast of hatred, intoxicated by the clash of steel, the song of death rings out to-day"), so now, in poem No. 101 of *Gītāñjali*, he is full of forebodings of the Balkan War and of a great catastrophe threatening Europe

"To-day I see the appearance of clouds in mankind,
They thunder, and march in close formation.

Loftier Themes

—
Their hearts dance ferociously,
They obliterate all boundaries in their course.
Under what impulse does cloud clash
On cloud and thunder echo forth?
I see the appearance of the clouds in mankind.

In masses and in bands they hasten into the distance;
They know not why they go,
They know not on what mountainside
They will descend as rain.
They know not what terrific life and death
Lie hidden in their bosom.
I see the appearance of the clouds in mankind.

The voice of the storm is murmuring
And rumbling away in the West.
What fate carries mute pain
In the silent darkness beyond the horizon?
Those dark thoughts clustering in the shadow—
What deed do they portend?
I see the appearance of the clouds in mankind."

In *Gītāñjali*, too, we meet echoes of the mysterious, but to the poet very clear relation between the artist and the "divinity of life" (*jībandebatā*). The poet asks amazed: "What divine liquor, O my God, (*mor debatā*) didst Thou wish to drink out of the overflowing cup of my life? Does it please Thee to see Thy picture through my eyes and silently to listen to Thy songs through my deluded ears?" In poem No 51 *jībandebatā* is called "the priest who lit the lamp of the poet's life

Loftier Themes

at the flame of his own life." The reader experiences with the poet, as it were, a great transformation of the meaning of life, not through mysticism, but naturally, by communion with the divine essence Poem No. 69 describes this very effectively:

"When my play was with Thee I never questioned who Thou wert. I knew nor shyness nor fear, my life was boisterous.

In the early morning Thou wouldst call me from my sleep like my own comrade and lead me running from glade to glade.

On those days I never cared to know the meaning of songs Thou sangest to me. Only my voice took up the tunes, and my heart danced in their cadence.

Now, when the playtime is over, what is this sudden sight that is come upon me? The world with eyes bent upon Thy feet stands in awe with all its silent stars."

(Translated by the poet himself for the English edition of *Gītāñjali*, No. 97. Macmillan & Co, London.)

With comradely gratitude the poet turns to this mysterious companion and leader of his life in poem No. 3: "To how many strangers Thou hast made me known! In how many houses hast Thou found me a place! Thou hast brought near to me, friend, that which was far away, and made a brother of the stranger. When I leave my old residence I ask myself sadly what is to come, forgetting that even in a new place Thou remainest the same."

The poet's views on this question determine at the same time his attitude towards the conclusion of the

present stage of man's unceasing pilgrimage, Death. It is interesting to compare some poems on death written by our Western poets with those in which Tagore greets death with the grateful satisfaction of a husbandman whose work has prospered and who now surveys the harvest of his years before giving over his fields with their mysterious wealth to his son The Lake School, to which Tagore is ideologically related, does not talk much of death. Wordsworth reconciles himself to death as the quiet culmination of a peaceful life. Coleridge regards death as the revealer of eternity and says in *Happiness*

“Till death shall close thy tranquil eye
While Faith proclaims ‘thou shalt not die!’ ”

Tagore's boyhood pattern, Shelley, for whom death is “the imperishable change that renovates the world,” and “the wonderful engine of necessity” is not afraid of death either, although he does call it “a gate of dreariness and gloom”.

“Death is a gate of dreariness and gloom,
That leads to azure isles and beaming skies
And happy regions of eternal hope
Therefore, O Spirit, fearlessly bear on.
Though storms may break the primrose on its stalk,
Though frosts may blight the freshness of its bloom,
Yet spring's awakening breath will woo the earth
To feed with kindest dews its favourite flower,
That blooms in mossy bank and darksome glens,
Lighting the greenwood with its sunny smile.”

Loftier Themes

And in *In Memoriam* (No. L) Tennyson writes:

"I wrong the grave with fears untrue:
Shall love be blamed for want of faith,
There must be wisdom with great Death.
The dead shall look me thro' and thro'.

Be near us when we climb or fall
Ye watch, like God, the rolling hours
With larger other eyes than ours,
To make allowance for us all "

The Czech poet Březina, who through his studies of Schopenhauer was led to the fertile well of Indian philosophy, regards death with no unfriendly eyes. For him, too, death is "the peace of morning songs," "a bath in the golden rain of stars" and "a sweet kiss on the lips." Another Czech poet, Viktor Dyk, reconciles himself to death with the words

"I tell you there's no death. There's but unceasing growth.
And such a growth that out-pains pain itself.
From pole to pole uncounted whispers breathe
Grow for your love, grow for the tasks to come,
You're but one link of an unending chain
Which will go on when you have ceased to be.
Dusk falls on you, but elsewhere day is breaking.
And for that new dawn's sake even your night is clear."

Loftier Themes

Another Czech poet, Wolker, in *Dying* voices the poignant cry of a suffering genius

"I'm not afraid of death, death is not hard, death is
but part of life's heaviness,
What's terrible, what's cruel, is dying.

.

When I die, nothing will happen or change in the
world,
I only shall be rid of my misery and shall change,
Perhaps I shall be a tree, or a child, or a heap of small
stones,
I'm not afraid of death, death is not hard, death is
but part of life's heaviness."

For Tagore death is the fulfilment of life, the bride of his life, God's messenger, to whom he opens the door with a glad welcome when he comes to him; and with whom he wishes to talk as to a friend when his radiant eye glimpses his approach. The idea of death holds no terrors for him.

"I shall not cease looking for you when the dawn of my birth breaks. I shall enter the world of new life; my eyes will gain new sight and, new in this light, I shall accept the bonds of a new link with you. I shall not cease looking for you.

You are infinitely immortal, so your game is ever new. I know not, Lord, in what attire you will return, when you approach and stand smiling in my path and

take me by the hand, and the rapture of new being fills my life. I shall not cease looking for you."

(*Gītāñjali*, No. 134.)

He imagines his exit from this life to be peaceful:

"If the day is done, if birds sing no more, if the wind has flagged tired, then draw the veil of darkness thick upon me, even as thou hast wrapt the earth with the coverlet of sleep and tenderly closed the petals of the drooping lotus at dusk.

From the traveller, whose sack of provisions is empty before the voyage is ended, whose garment is torn and dust-laden, whose strength is exhausted, remove shame and poverty, and renew his life like a flower under the cover of thy kindly night "

(Translated by the poet himself for the English edition of *Gītāñjali*, No 24. Macmillan & Co., London.)

When the hour of our departure from this world strikes, and the wall which separates life from death becomes transparent, the poet wishes to give death the whole vast riches of his life.

"On the day when death will knock at thy door what wilt thou offer to him?

Oh, I will set before my guest the full vessel of my life—I will never let him go with empty hands.

All the sweet vintage of all my autumn days and summer lights, all the earnings and gleanings of my

busy life will I place before him at the close of my life when death will knock at my door."

(Translated by the poet himself for the English edition of *Gītāñjali*, No 90 Macmillan & Co., London)

J. Snajdr, the publisher who issued most of the Czech translations of Tagore's works, mentions what a consolation *Gītāñjali* and *Sādhanā* were to Czech soldiers leaving for the front during the Great War. The departure of every contingent of troops meant a rise in his sales. Poems of this type certainly were one of the greatest consolations to soldiers going to their death.

In 1911 the attempt was made to reorganize Brahmasamaj and to amalgamate the sects, which after all had all the same aim. All were strictly theistic, with a progressive social programme. In general they differed merely as to the path to this goal. The head of Sadharanbrahmasamaj at that time was Śivanath Śastri, a noble and very tolerant character, of very profound learning. After the death of Debendranath, Adibrahmasamaj had no prominent leader except Rabindranath. Unfortunately no agreement was achieved. Brahmasamaj had survived its usefulness, and had already fulfilled its great mission, for many of the things for which the first adherents of Brahmasamaj had struggled so untiringly were now accepted by the upper classes in Bengal as a matter of course.

The poet's fiftieth birthday was celebrated all over the country. His Śantiniketan in particular was full of joyous pride and his pupils' gratitude. On the festive

day *The King of the Dark Chamber* was produced, the poet appearing in the part of the old man, in which, as usual, he charmed his audience. Even the Bengal literary world could not but appreciate his great work for his country, although it did not agree with him in all respects. The Bengal Academy of Literature, of which he was one of the founders, found words of sincere and grateful recognition for his activities.

Perhaps the best known of Tagore's dramatic works in Europe is *Dākghar* ("Post Office"), a three-act play written in 1912, based on a dramatic tale as simple as was *Achalāyatan*.

Amal, a sick boy, longs to go to the mountain which he can see from the window of his step-father's hut, and far away beyond it, or to step out freely like a man, with a bag over his shoulder; he looks forward to being able to go so far and to cross many, many brooks when he gets well. His step-father, Madhab, warns him not to call out again to strangers when he is alone in the hut, but Amal is very fond of speaking to strangers. When his step-father goes away and the milkseller passes by, Amal calls to him to take him with him, he calls to the policeman, too, so that he can have a talk with him. He asks him why he strikes the gong, and the policeman tells him that his gong is meant to tell everybody that time waits for no man and goes on and on unceasingly towards a land unknown. The sick boy immediately catches this up and says that he would like to fly with time to that unknown land. The policeman tells him that we all go there one day. But Amal objects

that the doctor does not allow him to go anywhere. He asks what happens in the great house opposite their hut. The policeman answers that this is the royal post office, and that one day he, too, may get a letter from it. Amal calls Sudha, the maiden who picks and sells flowers, and confides to her how much he would like to pick blossoms from the highest branches or to be a *chāmpā* flower high up in one of the trees. A band of children passes his window and Amal calls to them to pause a moment. The children call him to come and play with them, but Amal answers sadly that the doctor has forbidden him to do so, but he gives them all his toys, only asking that they should come and play with them under his window. In the next act Amal, already so weak that he has to lie all day in bed, asks "grandfather," the old man who understands the boy best of all and to-day, too, adapts himself to the boy's strange desire to flee to distant lands, whether he knows whether the King has already sent him a letter. The old man assures him that the letter will certainly come. The King's doctor comes and, disregarding the commands of the village doctor, orders all the doors and windows to be opened, Amal says that he feels better now that the light of the stars falls on him, and falls asleep. Sudha, the flower-girl, comes in, bringing him flowers, and asks when Amal will wake up, not realizing that he is dead, she asks them to tell him, when he wakes up, that she has not forgotten him.

The idea underlying *Post Office* is not so clear as in the case of *Achalāyatan*, but it is evident that Amal personifies man's longing for free and natural develop-

ment. This longing is fettered by external trivialities, suppressed by those around us, who do not understand or are not favourably inclined towards it, the doctor considers it a disease and says that it must be restricted, the head man of the village is ironical about it and Madhab does not understand it, but a plain man, like Thākurdādā, a flower-girl or the children, understands it and submits to it. Amal himself expects his liberation to come through a message "from the king", his messenger comes and orders everything to be opened, so that Amal can be reborn in a world of freedom.

At the beginning of 1912 the poet decided to go to Europe. This time he wished to visit Denmark in particular, in order to study its co-operative system. But shortly before his departure he fell ill and the journey had to be postponed, although his luggage was on board and in fact was taken as far as Madras.

In the same year *Jibansmṛiti*, the memoirs of his youth, was published. This work was translated into English and first published in 1917 under the title *My Reminiscences*. In this work the poet speaks modestly and humorously of his youth; the present description of his début as a poet draws considerably from Tagore's own book. In the same year a selection of letters written by the poet between 1885 and 1895 was published under the title *Chhinnapatra* ("Torn Letters"). See p. 81.

Chapter Five

FAME AND WORLD-WIDE RECOGNITION

THE journey to the West, upon which he embarked after a period of short and inadequate convalescence at Śilaidah, was to bring him world-wide fame, although the ailing poet did not suspect this at the time and in his shyness and love of solitude did not even desire it.

During his sojourn in the United States in the winter of 1912-13 and in England in May and June of 1913 Tagore delivered a number of lectures, which after some adaptation he subsequently submitted to his European readers under the title *Sādhanā*. The word *sādhanā* denotes, in Indian religious terminology, the practical side of religion, and includes all the methods which serve to put spiritual cognition into practice. Even in the earliest times Indian philosophers, full of genuine appreciation of the seriousness of this problem and of sincere confidence in man, had meditated on the nature of the world, the nature of man and the mission of both. They frequently wondered whether everything that we see around us is real, or whether it is only real so long and in the same way as we perceive everything around us. The poets of the Vedas pondered over some of these problems as early as about 1000 B.C., but we do not encounter philosophic tracts until later, about 600 B.C.

Fame and World-wide Recognition

in the Upanishads. The teaching of some of the Upanishads may be abbreviated to the effect that everything around us is permeated by God. God is everything, God is my soul too, and that is I. On this theopanism Rabin-dranath Tagore's religious and philosophical opinions, as they are expounded and elaborated in *Sādhana*, are founded. This work is a collection of thoughts on life and its practical application, which is nothing else but constant sacrifice. These are the thoughts which he expounds to the inmates of Śantiniketan at the weekly religious meetings. *Sādhana* contains eight chapters the first four deal with the individual's attitude towards the world, his consciousness of his own soul, the problem of evil and the problem of the ego; the other four discuss the realization of love, the realization of life (a particularly interesting chapter), the realization of beauty and the realization of the infinite. Whereas Western civilization erects a high wall between man and the rest of nature, India, he says, has on the contrary always emphasized the unity of man and the rest of nature. The barrier between man and the rest of the world is merely artificial. Just as man cannot be separated from the rest of the world, so God, too, who permeates everything, both the age-old tree and the crops which sprout every year anew, cannot be separated from the world. This divinity, which manifests itself in the processes of nature, this eternal principle inhabits man, also who is part of the universe, and man's task is to realize this principle, find this divinity in himself and then to apply this recognition in his life. It cannot be denied of course that the world contains evil, pain and imperfection

Fame and World-wide Recognition

as well. The question why there is evil, pain and imperfection may be countered by the question whether evil or imperfection are the aim of anything on earth. There can only be one answer. No. It is impossible to take seriously those philosophers who proclaim that there is positive evil in the world, for life itself proves them to be wrong. Everything progresses towards perfection. A man who is aware of his innate value is aware of what he can become, and starts to distinguish between his desires and the good which will finally become the sole aim of his life. A man who lives for some idea or for his country is less affected by pain. Joy, too, has less influence over a man who lives the higher life. It depends upon the individual what influence temporary evil or temporary pain are to have on him. Because part of the divinity of life dwells in us, we are immortal in respect of this part, and this immortal part of us experiences an unending series of lives and deaths. This rids us of fear of death, for only our earthly body dies. Just as it is necessary to bring into harmony all the various desires and longings in our physical body, so it is necessary to harmonize the desires which affect our communal life. We yearn for freedom and pleasure, but wish to pay as little as possible for both. This causes struggles and conflicts. But it is necessary to maintain harmony and bring our love and our goodness into play, for only so can we achieve personal greatness. The divinity which dwells in us gives us not only itself, but also the strength to consider the deeds we do as our own achievement. In this way the divinity directs our actions, which in spite of this fact are not mechanical, for they are prompted

Fame and World-wide Recognition

by the depths of a spirit whose joy is work. And this strength bestowed on us by divinity should be utilized all our life long, which we should spend in doing good; but we should live it to the full and not in sterile self-denial, in hermits' cells. Even in everyday life man's surroundings are full of beauty; his task is to recognize this beauty and put it into practice in himself and around him in all his actions. In this way man achieves his destined community with the world. The worst evil which can befall a man is not to understand God. But understanding is not all that is necessary, he must increase his contacts with Him and through Him increase his contacts with his fellow-men, his companion in this world's pleasures, and with the rest of nature, animate and inanimate, which is bound up with us through God in an eternal brotherhood. A man would be of no importance if he could not achieve this supreme perfection. But we cannot unite ourselves with God except in ourselves, in our own work and our own endeavours.

These opinions, which are by no means a new philosophy or a thoroughly worked out system, contain no puritan homilectics. Tagore, who is unshakable in his faith in man, wishes to oppose the world-wide opinion that man is essentially sinful and must be saved by God's grace, and to emphasize that there is a divinity in man and that this is man's glory.

With *Sādhana* the poet benefited Hinduism also. Not only did he make it widely known in the world, but he also pointed out to conservative circles in India how to infuse new life into Hinduism.

In September 1913 he returned to India, and one

evening early in November he and the whole world learned that he had been awarded the Nobel prize for literature. His poetry had been made accessible to the world through a small volume of poems, published in 1912. In that year an English translation of a selection of some of his recent poems was published, more particularly from *Naibedya*, *Kheyā* and *Gītāñjali*, under the title *Gitanjali*. This was not, however, the first occasion on which his work was presented to the English-speaking public. As early as 1910 the first translation of a tale by Tagore was published in the *Calcutta Modern Review*; the publisher, Ramananda Chatterjee, an old friend of the poet's, wished some of Tagore's poems, too, to be translated into English, and discussed the matter with the poet. Tagore brought him two poems translated by Lokendranath Pailt, these appeared in the same periodical in May and September 1911. But Ramananda Chatterjee would have liked the poems to have been translated into English by the poet himself, and asked him to do so. But Tagore, alluding to the fact that as a schoolboy English had cost him severe struggles, replied humorously by quoting two lines of a poem of his (*Gān*; cf p 197). "Under what pretext will you make her come back whom you dismissed with tears in her eyes?" Nevertheless, he shortly afterwards brought translations of several poems, which were published in *The Modern Review*.

In *Men and Memories* Sir William Rothenstein tells how *Gītāñjali* came to be published in English. It was Rothenstein who induced the India Society in London to publish a selection of Tagore's poems in English. He

Fame and World-wide Recognition

had made the acquaintance of Tagore before this, during a visit to the poet's nephew, the painter Abanindranath Tagore in India. At that time Tagore's appearance strongly attracted him, and it seemed to him that in this man, who was silently listening to talk about art, apparently absorbed in thought, physical and moral beauty were harmoniously wedded. At the time, however, no one told him that this was one of the greatest modern Indian authors. The tale which appeared in translation in *The Modern Review* in 1910 appealed to him greatly, and he enquired in Calcutta whether English translations of any other tales were obtainable. A volume of Tagore's poems translated by Ajit Chakrabarti, a teacher in Bolpore, was sent to him. In May 1912 the poet undertook the journey to Europe which had previously had to be postponed on account of his illness. In London he asked Rothenstein to take pity on his solitude, and Rothenstein gladly gave him the freedom of his house, which was frequented by a number of literary men. During his visit his host asked him whether he had translations of any of his poems. Tagore had with him some poems which he had translated during his illness, when his doctor had forbidden him to do hard work. Most of these were from *Gītāñjali*; Rothenstein gave them to W. B. Yeats, who was enchanted with their profundity. Yeats prepared them for print, suggested slight changes here and there, and wrote a preface. Rothenstein's portrait of Tagore is on the title page of this book.

The book was published privately for members of the India Society in London. It is dated 1912, but was not in the hands of the public until 1913. This work

Fame and World-wide Recognition

won the heart of Europe for its author. It should be added that six poems from *Gitanjali* were published as early as 1912 in the December number of the *Chicago Poetry*. This was the first time that Tagore's poems were printed in the West. Miss Monroe, the editor of *Poetry*, met Tagore in Chicago and obtained his permission to publish six of his poems in this periodical. The West received Tagore's poems with enthusiasm, for they sounded a new note. The mystery of India, the charm of his ideas captured the fancy of European readers whom the oppressive pre-War atmosphere at home pre-disposed in their favour. The friendly words of the critics brought him a growing number of readers. The English *Gitanjali* ran into several editions before the first Bengali edition was sold.

His fame spread far beyond the frontiers of his country into all parts of the world, and the eager desire of his turbulent youth to spread his wings and to rid himself of all limitations was fully satisfied. The University of Calcutta gave him an honorary degree and requested him to accept the task of judging Bengali theses submitted by candidates for university degrees, although only a short time before the senate of the same University had not agreed to this. the *pandits* were not satisfied with his linguistic innovations. In 1914, at the suggestion of the Anglo-Indian Government, he was knighted.

It is necessary to say a few words about the English translation of his works. It is certainly incorrect to blame the poet for frequently changing the expression and length of his Bengali poems, and in places also their meaning. It is true that his translations are frequently

Fame and World-wide Recognition

mere poetical paraphrases, not so rich as the original text, for the English version has neither the wealth of metrical forms, the melodiousness of language, nor the swinging rhyme of the Bengali original. But a poet-translator is not a mere translator, he creates something new, the differences between his English rendering and the Bengali original must necessarily be viewed in this light. Yet translations which do not come from the poet himself should not lightly dispense with the wealth of the Bengali original, they should reverently and faithfully interpret the words of the author.

World-wide fame, which he considered was not really due to him, bound him to further service. In 1914, in pursuance of his endeavours to help his people, he founded an agricultural school which was attached to Śantiniketan school, he gave it the name of Śriniketan, or the Seat of Prosperity. Tagore's idea was that the curriculum of this agricultural school should be adapted to the needs of the surrounding peasants, with whom the school was to be in constant contact. One of its main objects was to maintain close relations with the peasants of the neighbourhood. The school was to instruct them, interest them in the sound and economic cultivation of the soil, help them in their difficulties and advise them when they themselves were at a loss. The school ran and still runs an experimental farm, breeds thoroughbred cattle and grows suitable crops, in order that the villagers may be convinced of the advantages of the advice given them. The Indian peasant's need for practical demonstration is evident from the following example, of which the writer was told during his stay at the school. The

inhabitants of one of the neighbouring villages refused for a long time to admit the advantages of an organized fire-brigade. In a Bengali village, where the huts are usually roofed with rice-straw, fire rages mercilessly. In the end the head of the school managed to persuade them to set fire to a heap of straw and wood which was placed away from the village, and to see whether they could put the fire out as quickly as his pupils. The bonfire was intentionally placed by the villagers in an inconvenient place, but the young schoolboys quickly put it out, whereas the bonfire of the villagers was burnt out before they brought the first bucket of water. Seeing this difference, the villagers incontinently volunteered as members of the fire-brigade, and the head of the school had even to stay there, although it was already late in the evening, to train them. The pupils of this school are therefore a means to an end. As soon as they have acquired the necessary knowledge they are sent out into the surrounding villages to advise the villagers and show them what is necessary. The importance of this idea for India is evident.

Tagore's lifelong and lively interest in the education of his people was demonstrated at a lecture held by him in February 1936, during "Education Week" in Calcutta. He demanded that the great difference between educated and lower classes be removed, arguing that no civilized country can allow the fertile soil of its people's minds to lack the life-giving water of knowledge, or to receive it to such an inadequate extent that it reached only the surface, whereas underneath a desert waste of ignorance remained.

Fame and World-wide Recognition

In 1914 he published *Gītimālya* ("A Wreath of Songs"), a collection of simple religious lyrics, akin to the poems of *Gītāñjali* and no less charming, but differing from his former poems in their greater confidence in man's perfectibility, as though the poet had gained a profounder consciousness of man's value in the world. More than humility, he emphasizes now the possibility of action and man's participation in the play of this world and in its regeneration. Thus he calls to his God to make him His instrument, just as He makes the light of the dawning day His instrument, and to make him play the same tune (*Gītimālya*, No. 19) The avenues of Śantiniketan echo the melody of this song early every morning. The poet becomes aware that his heart is a source of great wealth and inexhaustible beauty. For if the human heart were not a treasure-chest of love, why would the Lord fill the morning sky with song, why would He have created the starry sky and banks of flowers, why would the south wind whisper its sweet message? "You stand on the other shore of my songs, my tunes reach your feet, but I do not reach you. A pleasant breeze is blowing, leave your boat tied up no longer. Come, cross over and enter my heart. My game of song with you is but a game at a distance, all the time the flute plays a mournful tune. Come, take up my flute and play on it yourself in the deep darkness of this joyful and silent night."

Of another character is *Gītālī* ("Collected Songs"), a collection of 108 songs written in the short period of two months and published in the same year as *Gītimālya*. They are full of love and enthusiasm for the world

Fame and World-wide Recognition

around him. The poet requests the God dwelling in his heart to fill his life with music and the message of His flute, that the cup of his heart may be full. He begs Him to fill his heart with truth and to remove the shadow of deceit by His pure beauty, strength and fire. His heart will dance in tune with the whole world and vibrate to the chords of the music of light. In poem No. 72 he says:

“O my heart-dweller, why do you not smile to-day? It is evening, and the eye of the moon has been covered by dark clouds. The flute of my heart has not played to-day I have cleaned the lamp, and it will burn the moment it is lighted. An armful of flowers has already been plucked, and with a little attention your garland will be woven.”

In another poem (No. 98) he greets Him:

“O my companion on the road, I salute you again and again! Accept a traveller’s salute.

O farewells and losses, O woods of the day that has ended, accept the salute of a house that has been broken up!

O light of the new morning, O eternal journey, accept the salute of fresh hope! O driver of my life’s chariot, I am an eternal traveller, accept my salute from my journey!”

Phālgunī (“Spring Play”), which was written for the Spring festival at Śantiniketan in 1915, is a vivid fantasy

Fame and World-wide Recognition

of the departure of Winter and the coming of Spring as symbol of the eternal cycle of life in this world. The songs at the beginning of each act and those scattered through the play, full of enchanting beauty, are clad in a mantle of symbolic expressions, and the reader gains the impression that some new teaching is intentionally veiled by this obscurity. The play resembles some of Tagore's drawings; it is impossible to say at first what they mean, but in spite of this their delicate lines disclose an underlying idea. In a witty prologue we read these words:

"King: 'Shall I understand the meaning of what you have written?'

Poet. 'What I have written must be taken as it is. Have I not said that it is all a flute which is here to be listened to, not to be understood?'

Nevertheless it is clear that in this play the poet desired to glorify the unceasing life on this earth

At this period it frequently happened, as though the result of an epidemic, that a Bengali girl poured oil over herself, set it alight and so burned to death. This was a silent protest against the Indian custom which compels parents to marry a girl as soon as she matures, frequently causing both difficulties for the parents and painful disappointment for the girl

Under the influence of these tragedies Tagore wrote the story *Strīr patra* ("A Wife's Letter"), which was published in a collection of stories entitled *Galpasaptak*. In this story Tagore condemns with melancholy bitter-

ness the firmly-established custom of wedding girls against their will. He turned his attention to the unfortunate social position of the Indian woman and described in this work the revolt of Mrinal, a young Bengali woman, against the injustice of convention. Her revolt grew out of her sorrow at the sad fate of Bindu, the young sister of her sister-in-law, who was compelled to marry a man whom she did not love and who, moreover, had occasional fits of madness. Bindu ran away from him, but her family compelled her to stay with him, "for she was his wife." She shortened her martyrdom by burning herself alive. Mrinal herself was not unhappy in her family life, as people ordinarily understand this word. But the death of the unfortunate Bindu made her realize that her pitiful existence was weighed down by the terrible burden of the Bengali woman's sad lot. She was no longer willing to humiliate her dignity as a woman. She left her family, but not to die like Bindu. This would be no solution for an advocate of optimism. "You thought I went away to die," the tale, which is in form of a letter, ends, "do not be afraid, I shall not play you such an old trick. In the same mood Mirabai (the most famous Indian poetess, circa 1470) says 'Though my father has forsaken me, though my mother has forsaken me, and whoever else may have forsaken me, faith has remained, O Lord, now come what may.'"

The novel *Chaturanga* ("A Tale in Four Pictures"), which is of unusual psychological interest, consists of four short stories. In the four pictures ("Uncle," "Śachīs," "Dāminī" and "Śrībilās") he describes vividly and with

Fame and World-wide Recognition

a rare gift of combination the fates of prominent members of an itinerant company which, under the leadership of Līlanandasvami, performs religious plays and songs combined with rhythmical dances, the so-called *kīrttans*. The first picture, showing the destiny of the atheist and philanthropist Jagamohan, Śachiś' uncle, who has understanding for human misery, is the background on which the fate of three further characters is displayed. Śachiś, who graduated at the university, joined Līlananda's troop out of religious enthusiasm. His friend Śrībīlas, too, who found him after a long search, carried away by his friendship, and under the influence of religious ecstasy, stayed with Līlanandasvami, dancing and singing the *kīrttan* songs in village after village. One day they visited Calcutta and stayed in the house left to Līlanandasvami in the will of the rich Śībatosh, which was inhabited by his young and childless widow, Damini, a mistress of the art of life. To the astonishment of all she joined the troop on its wanderings. Her never-satisfied longing to live a fuller life, her mystical fervour, her concealed love-affair and final happiness in the great love of Śrībīlas, unfortunately terminated after a year by her death, makes her the central figure of the novel, standing out in sharp relief against the lightly-sketched and rather inconsistent other characters. His description of the life of these religious mendicants is drawn with unusually rich colours on a historical background. In this novel the poet abandoned his own class, but we find confirmation elsewhere for his interest in the life of such itinerant singers.

During the Great War the importance of India for

Fame and World-wide Recognition

the British Empire was clearly demonstrated. In spite of the revolutionary tendencies which manifested themselves in India after the partition of Bengal, particularly in this latter province, India as a whole was loyal, and the politically mature classes sincerely supported the Allies in their struggle for the great ideals of democracy. But there was nevertheless a handful of men who thought that the decisive moment had come for India to struggle for her freedom. These Indian patriots, who did not venture upon open revolutionary activities in India itself, carried the torch of revolt into Afghanistan and the North-West frontier, and tried to influence the mentality of the Indian soldiers leaving for the front. A special committee of anti-British Indians was formed in Berlin, which collaborated with the Central Powers; the promise was given to them that in the event of the victory of the Central Powers one of the German conditions of peace would be freedom for India. The propaganda launched by this committee was extended to India itself as well.

The general unrest and his own reaction to it led Tagore's thoughts back to the stormy years of his political activities ten years previously; this was the origin of the novel *Ghare-bāire* ("The Home and the World"), which was published in 1916. In this novel he returns to the year 1908, when methods of violence were first used in Indian politics. Tagore of course disapproved of these. He was convinced that Indian philosophy can find a peaceful compromise with the mechanism of Western civilization. He constantly proclaimed toleration and disagreed with the boycott of foreign goods,

Fame and World-wide Recognition

which fed the flames of hatred. In these exciting times, in the heart of the movement for a new Indian patriotism he laid the scene of this political novel.

Nikhil, an educated nobleman, a high-minded and profoundly-convinced man, disapproves of the attitude of his friend Sandip, who recklessly and mercilessly incites his countrymen to boycott foreign goods. By brilliant eloquence Sandip even wins over to his side Bimala, Nikhil's kind-hearted but capricious wife, robbing Nikhil not only of her belief in his convictions, but also of her love. In separate chapters the three main characters confess their feelings to the reader. Bimala, who is purified by suffering and returns to Nikhil with humility and profounder confidence, after she has overcome her precarious vacillation, Nikhil, who sees his country's strength only in truth, and who not only confesses his weakness, but also the sudden strength which came to him when he made up his mind that he must fight his way through without always worrying whether his heart aches now and then, Sandip with his Mephistophelean statement that only dullards worship the gods, whereas he himself creates them, but who in the end is compelled by the prickings of his conscience, with tears of penance, to restore to Bimala, the queen of his despair, the money which he induced her to contribute to the national cause.

In Nikhil the author portrays a pensive character who wins the heart of the reader and is in sharp contrast to the other characters, in Sandip, who juggles with ideals, he criticizes the Bengali hotheads. The subordinate characters are vivid and lifelike. The most important of these

Fame and World-wide Recognition

are the devoted Amulya, Nikhil's old teacher, Panchu, the cunning weakling, and Bimala's sister, caustically ironical, but yielding at the sight of the pain of the object of her constant irony. It was to be expected that his critics would accuse him, even though unjustly, of a lack of patriotism, but this time the critics, who were fond of attacking him, perhaps for his very greatness, accused the work of artistic shortcomings. The novel, however, is a promising forerunner of his later social novels.

The war years were for this confirmed advocate of humanity a period of searing heartburn. He saw the war as the logical consequence of the development of Europe's rapacious civilization, rushing to its merited doom. He therefore willingly signed an appeal for peace.

An excess committed by some Indian students which, although apparently insignificant, showed the degree of tension in the country, was the cause of very strained relations between Tagore and viceregal circles. Professor Oaten of Presidency College frequently commented on current events in his lectures in an insulting manner which hurt the students. Some students talking loudly before his classroom were offended by his harsh rebuke. It was of course wrong of the students to lay hands on the professor for this. But there is no doubt that Tagore, who as a practical teacher was asked his opinion, was entitled to say that he considered that some blame attached to the professor if in India, where from time immemorial students have had so much respect for their teachers, such a violent deed was possible. This statement of Tagore's, which was reported in print,

aroused unfavourable attention in Anglo-Indian circles and was for a long time held out against him.

Tagore was always on the side of progress and fervently desired the social regeneration of his nation. In April 1914 Pramathanath Chaudhuri, by profession a lawyer, but at the same time a man of letters, started to publish a monthly periodical entitled *Sabujpatra* ("Green Leaf") The mission of this paper was to emphasize the characteristic Indian values and their realism and to satirize sterile conventionality, empty snobbery and hazy romanticism. It satirized and caustically criticized both moss-grown orthodoxy and witless imitation of everything British. Chaudhuri's realistic views led him to try to reform the Indian literary tongue and to eradicate the dead elements in it. The intention was to popularize the literary tongue and to write the language in the same way as it was spoken. Its programme was to accept the foundation of the national tradition, but not to avoid fresh currents from the West. The periodical aroused considerable opposition in Bengal at the time. *Sabujpatra's* undaunted attack on public opinion in Bengal at the time is evident from its very first number, in which we read that European literature and philosophy do not send mind and body to sleep, but invigorate them, though European civilization may be an intoxicating drink or a poison, it never allows one to remain in peace, but always stimulates, it is modern Bengal's conflict with British civilization, the paper continues, which gave rise to the beneficial impatience to move freely everywhere. After Chaudhuri, with whom he was related, as his niece Indira was the former's wife,

Fame and World-wide Recognition

Rabindranath Tagore was the principal contributor to this periodical. He was at the same time a prominent member of this progressive group, and from this time inclined towards poetical liberalism, as far, of course, as his disposition allowed. His confidence seems to have culminated at this time. His previous attitude of humility seems to have been succeeded by a more constructive attitude towards life. The power of his poems has made him known and esteemed throughout the world. In a poem written at this time he addresses his Creator proudly

“Thou hast given birds song, so they sing,
But birds can give Thee no more,
To me Thou hast given but speech, but I
Can sing to Thee as well.”

His self-confidence is evident from all the poems written in the years 1914-16, which he published under the title of *Balākā* (“The Swan”). After limiting the scope of his imagination in *Gītāñjali*, he restores it to its full extent once more in this work. His metre is strictly disciplined, and its rhythm is full and has the power of a bell cast from some rare metal. At fifty-five—an advanced age for an Indian—the poet’s powers are at their zenith. His songs, the reflections of past dreams thirsting for form, are not limited to the place of their birth, they drink in the bright light of joy and dance like foam on the waves, they know no storerooms and pilgrim, unknown guests, from place to place (No. 15). In the same mood, in poem No. 30, he calls

Fame and World-wide Recognition

himself a pilgrim to the Unknown. The Unknown is the captain of the ship of his life, he has concluded a pact with him for all eternity and wishes never to return to familiar shores. Standing by the river Jhelum, gazing into a precipice and turning again to the snow-capped peaks surmounting a slope of odorous deodars, he is seized by his old wild desire for movement, by a longing to fly on invisible paths into the unborn future, listening to the mighty choral of the vast, winged cosmos. "Not here, elsewhere, elsewhere, in some other place." He sings of the foresight of Śahjahan who, knowing that time removes all trace of youth, honours and wealth, and that in time the sparkle of jewels and the beauty of pearls fades, built the Taj Mahal to resist eternity and to repeat unceasingly that the emperor has not forgotten his beloved, his wife But is it true, emperor? Who can say that you have not forgotten? "For who can permanently check the course of life, which rolls irresistibly over the whole world and breaks all ties of memory?" Life, the great traveller, shaking off the bonds imposed on it by presumption, rolls unhindered on. On the occasion of the Shakespeare tercentenary he honoured the memory of the immortal poet, the heritage of the whole world, known three hundred years ago only in his island home, but to-day acclaimed all over the world, even on the palm beaches of the Indian Ocean.

Tagore has an unshakable belief in humanity, is convinced that peace, good and eternal unity are verities, for "if immortality had not been achieved even in the depths of the heart of death, if truth had not been achieved in the struggle against pain, if sin had not

Fame and World-wide Recognition

been vanquished by the shame of its own sight, if pride had not collapsed under the burden of its insupportable structure, why should all those thousands and thousands who are forsaken by their country be lost under the banner of hope, like millions of stars at the coming of the morning light? Would the streams of the blood of heroes and of the tears of mothers be lost in the dust of the earth? Why should not heaven be given in exchange? Would not the Great Accountant remember to settle that debt? Would not day come after a night of penance? And when humanity shook off the yoke of this universe, destined to perish in its cruel sufferings and in death, would not God's eternal greatness be manifested, righting all these wrongs?" (No 37).

Jibandebatā is apostrophized in poem No 40.

"At this moment you see the morning light through the window of my eyes, from the brink of my heart, this your gaze, passing through many days and many nights, brought my soul the eternal music of the spheres and divine portents without name

"So often to-day it has occurred to me that on the other bank of my memory I have seen many events, many ages, many eyes, many people, and solitude. All that I have seen breathes to-day somewhere, every moment, in the life of the plants, in the rustle of the bamboo grove, in the trembling of the leaves.

"Wrapped in many and many a new veil, in countless disguises, in many shapes, in new and new incarnations you have seen without a word the face of your only lover, in evening meetings under the nameless stars. So

Fame and World-wide Recognition

to-day, under the infinite sky, the muted melody of your meetings without beginning and of your partings without end sounds at intervals in a painful fulness.

“Therefore all that you have seen is deeply overlaid by all that you have not seen. Therefore to-day in the south wind, in the scent of the flowers of the spring grove, a great melancholy, the whispers and glances of many hundreds of incarnations, has awoken.”

This poem is reminiscent of the Czech poet Březina's magnificent *Myth of Souls*:

“Through lands that for centuries bloomed in the eyes
of my forefathers,
Pilgrimed my soul on the waves of an unborn dream
eyes closed and dumb,
At every step it took the night lapped at its feet,
Swallowed the sun, made every colour dim and
every mind alike,
Crushed the last words of my fathers by the silent
shock of its waves,
And watered the roots of my present pains with dew
of darkened lights.”

The difference between the two poets is only that Březina uses subdued colours and emphasizes the shadows, whereas Tagore is not gloomy, and emphasizes the lighter phases and the joyous mystery of eternal life.

The twelfth poem in this book is closely related to the poems on death in *Gītāñjali*. With the wise resigna-

Fame and World-wide Recognition

tion of maturity the poet praises his God for graciously allowing his days to pass in a constant coming and going of joy and sorrow, a constant expectation of his gifts. His gifts were granted sometimes in scant measure, at other times in sudden profusion. The poet surrounded himself with their wealth, squandered some, left others idle like the toys a child has forgotten. Nevertheless, in His munificence the Lord continued to give. But to-day the burden of these gifts is great and the poet can no longer bear it, he does not wish to allow his heart to go on begging and thirsting for further gifts, which fill the mornings and evenings of his life. He asks when will a sudden night breeze blow out the lamp of his waiting and set him free in the infinite purity of the sky.

The last two poems of the book, a kind of prologue and epilogue, form a separate entity. The first addresses the poet's youth, a venturesome bird preparing to fly over the sea, a pilgrim without rest and without fatigue, breaking the bonds of the ages, ever rising, like the flame which is his symbol. The second poem shows the pilgrim old and tired, the night of the past year is over, but he receives the blessing of the new year in the promise that death will close and open again ever new gates of joyous lives.

Some of the poems in this work clearly reflect the idea already indicated in a previous play (*Phālgunī*), later proclaimed with increasing emphasis and urgency. Man's mission is to build up heaven—the Creator gave birds the power of song and a bird gives no more than was given to it. But a poet, although given only the power of speech, sings songs as well. The wind was given

Fame and World-wide Recognition

freedom, the poet was loaded with many fetters, but still he believes that one day he will appear free at the feet of his Lord. The earth was given the smile of a moonlight night, but the forehead of the poet is wrinkled with suffering. Yet he tries to erase it with his own tears and to smoothe it with joys. The earth was granted the gift of light and darkness, Man only was placed on it empty-handed. Gifts were given to all, on him only were claims made. Man was given a heavy burden, but at the same time a great mission: to make heaven on earth.

Life is a poem of unsurpassable beauty. Man dies in order to learn that life is inexhaustible; he loves this world because his life was spent there. Confident in the belief that man is working here to the same end as God, Tagore arrives at the conclusion that man's aim is earth. It is not necessary to seek heaven, it is heaven which is fulfilled in man himself.

"Do you know where heaven is, my brother? Heaven has no boundaries. It has no beginning and no end, no districts and no poles, no day and no night.

"I wandered through the emptiness of heaven like a poor pilgrim. Through the merits of past centuries I was born to-day as a son of this world, this clod of earth. To-day heaven lives in my body, in my love, in the anxiety of my heart, in my timidity and my strivings, my joys and my sorrows. Heaven shines in ever-changing colours on the waves of my life and death. To-day heaven sings in my song and has found its fulfilment in my life" (No. 24)

Fame and World-wide Recognition

Here, too, Tagore is in harmony with the spirit of his country. Nearly six hundred years ago Chāṇḍidas had sung:

“Hear, O people, O brothers,
Man is the highest truth,
There is nothing higher than man is.”

His scattered lyrics, poems written for various occasions and his patriotic songs were collected and published in 1916 together with *Bālmīkī pratibhā* and *Māyār khelā* under the title of *Gān* (“Songs”). The two latter musical plays, as has been mentioned, contain a number of lyrical insertions. In some of these songs the reader feels clearly the lack of the accompanying music. This is particularly the case with the following poem:

“Now under what pretext will you make her come
back, whom you dismissed with tears in her eyes?
To-day in this sweet breeze in the flower grove at
night you recollect her under the *bakul* tree.
Now under what pretext will you make her come
back?

“On that day even the beautiful Spring night had
mingled with the heart,
Everywhere it was full of flowers;
If only a few words of love were whispered,
If only you had put that garland round her neck!
Now under what pretext will you make her come
back?

Fame and World-wide Recognition

“The beautiful night of the Spring moon
Returns again and again, but one who has gone away
never returns.
The day was favourable, it was the mistake of a
moment
And the thirsting heart burns for ever!
Now under what pretext will you make her come
back?”

It will be remembered that Tagore quoted the first two lines of this poem in reply to Ramananda Chatterjee, who asked him to translate some of his poems into English for *The Modern Review*

It is no wonder that during the War Tagore severely condemned Europe and Western civilization, which permitted so many horrors. Japan, too, although centuries ago it had accepted Buddha's message of peace gratefully, soon adapted itself to Western civilization. In May 1916 Tagore left for Japan, where he delivered a number of lectures. These lectures, in a slightly modified form, were published in English under the title *Nationalism* in 1917, his impressions of Japan are recorded in letter form in *Jāpānjātrī* (“A Traveller in Japan”), published in 1919

In *Nationalism* Tagore devotes three chapters to nationalism in the West, nationalism in Japan and India, and to the difference between the aggressive mentality of the West and ancient India's ideal of humility. In India the individual realizes his position with regard to his family, his gotra, to his caste, his religion and to a geographical entity which is not necessarily identical

Fame and World-wide Recognition

with the state-entity. In this scale of values his attitude to his nation is not included. Failing to find this conception at home, Tagore adopts the Western European angle. In France, for example, the conception of nationality is identical with that of citizenship; he neglects the definition of this term which takes as its main characteristics a (possibly only hypothetical) common origin, common fate and common culture. To Tagore nationalism is the organization of a state-entity, which can be kept alive or extended from selfish motives by harsh and unjust methods. In this unspiritual organization he sees the root of all evil, for this "nationalist" imperialism represents to him the suppression of individuality and the end of all personality. "The nation" may give order, may give justice and nevertheless both may be Danaean gifts, for under their pressure humanity may suffer, the call of the sufferer may pass unheard and the power of nature may be unable to find manifestation in its full beauty. By "the nation" Tagore means above all the British. But it would be false to think that Tagore is blind to the good which Britain has done in India. "I know that the British love justice and freedom and hate a lie. They are pure in their thoughts, sincere in their habits and faithful friends, their actions are honourable and trustworthy." Tagore has said expressly that the Indians have neither the right nor the power to exclude the British from participation in India's destiny. But although the Indians have learnt to recognize the good qualities of the British, they nevertheless feel British rule as a suffocating fog obscuring the sun. Their former rulers, who were also foreigners, were worse, but their

Fame and World-wide Recognition

rule was not the rule of a nation, for the warp of their administration "was loose and the life of the Indians was able to weave its thread and its patterns into its wide mesh." Tagore compares the difference between it and the British rule to the difference between a hand-loom and a machine-loom "In the products of the hand-loom lies the magic of the living fingers of the weaver, and its beat is in harmony with the music of life. But a machine-loom is mercilessly lifeless, exact and monotonous in its products."

Under this dead pressure on its life India suffers. Tagore says that it is a fallacy to think that mere political freedom will liberate the Indians. Liberation must come from a man's heart. To achieve this internal liberty India will need the support of science, as the West needs it. The main obstacle in the path of Indian political unity is the differences of race and caste. For it cannot be presumed that a class which refuses to interbreed with others could be induced by force or for money to shed its blood for the sake of freedom and unity. And if the Indian "nationalists" quote Switzerland as an argument against this, it may be countered that in Switzerland members of the different races may intermarry and merge socially into one another. If a nation oppresses another it happens one day that the oppressors lose their moral strength, and then a collision between the two is inevitable. Expansion must be condemned. There is enough room in the world for all nations. The nations should preserve their independence. Japan, another victim to the poison of imperialism, seeks support in its present competition with Europe, in Asia, which, if even par-

tially united, would be a mighty unit. But there are many hindrances in the path to that union. Tagore hopes that man will be reborn in free individuality when he overcomes his selfishness and accepts pure humanity. Even in Europe which to-day—the book was written during the Great War—is visited by the curse of nationalism, noble spirits have been found to struggle in the interests of humanity and against militarism. When this day of purification dawns, he says, “we shall be called upon to bring our own vessel of sacred water—the water of worship—to sweeten the history of man into purity, and with its sprinkling make the trampled dust of the centuries blessed with fruitfulness.” He emphasizes most decidedly that the goal of history is not passionate national self-adoration, just as it is not a colourless and hazy cosmopolitanism. He thinks that the mentality of the world must be changed, that the supremacy of egoistic nationalism cannot be suffered, and that the man of the future must be educated to believe in the wide brotherhood of mankind. He desires a community of noble aspirations, a spirit of sincerity between man and man and of mutual service.

This was the origin of the idea of *Viśvabharati*, which five years later was put into practice.

In 1916 he left Japan for the United States of America. His lectures in the U.S.A. were published under the title *Personality* in 1917. In one of these lectures, speaking of art, he first tries to find the reason for its existence, and endeavours to ascertain whether the origin of art is due to some social need or the desire to meet man's

Fame and World-wide Recognition

aesthetic longings, or whether it is the result of man's imperative need for expression. He is of the opinion that man feels compelled to give expression to his pleasant and unpleasant sensations, and that the emotional energy which is not consumed by the instinct of self-preservation seeks a vent in creative art. All human civilization, he says, is the product of abundance. In Art man expressed himself, so that the artist's main desire is to express his divine essence in everything; in deeds done, in the accessories of everyday life, in contacts with other people. Man has a double life: his animal life consists in the satisfaction of his desires, and he is born into his second life when he asks himself the question what is permitted to him and what not; this is the beginning of his moral life. The harm done to his moral life is done by sin. Pain afflicts a man, sin afflicts his divine essence. In our physical life we are finite, in our moral life we are born to the freedom in which our personality can be manifested. Each of our endeavours should aim at approaching the Supreme Being, which in turn approaches us. The creation of the physical world is God's creation, but in the creation of the spiritual world we are fellow-workers with God. Here God must await our will, in order that it may be in harmony with His will and His creation. The body should not be regarded as a prison from which the soul must be liberated. The spirit of man is betrothed to matter, this constitutes a favourable condition for man's development; his imperfection is not a sign of decadence, but a necessary condition for his improvement.

In another lecture he spoke of Śantiniketan school,

Fame and World-wide Recognition

where the pupils are brought up in liberty, in a joyful and free community with their teachers and the whole of nature. Other lectures, again, deal with the true character of ancient Indian meditation and with woman's place in the family and her value for the development of civilization.

He returned from the United States a tired man, and his old wounds began to bleed afresh when he stood at the bedside of his sick daughter.

The same year (1917) a collection of his short sayings and poetic fragments was published under the title *Stray Birds* (Macmillan & Co., London).

"O Beauty, find thyself in love, not in the flattery of thy mirror."

"Men are cruel, but Man is kind "

"I shall die again and again to know that life is inexhaustible."

"Clouds come floating into my life from other days, no longer to shed rain or usher storm, but to give colour to my sunset sky."

In 1918 he published a collection of poetical reflections and sketches, *Palātakā* ("The Fugitive"). The grandeur and power of *Balākā* are succeeded by a reflective admiration of nature and by the world-embracing compassion of an aching heart. It is life that eternally flies in the painful compulsion of haste. But the dust of the earth becomes sweetness under its feet. Storms shower death on the banks of life and regenerate the heart. He advises submission to joy, saying resignedly that it is unnecessary

to consider whether the hands of the beloved around one's neck are an illusion, for after all the embrace is sweet, and if it is an illusion, it can be forgotten. When we listen to the song of life, the music can be accepted without worrying whether the words of the song are true. Wisdom bought by sorrow enters the poet's heart.

The metre of this collection is very free, it approaches poetical prose; the poems contain a large number of colloquial expressions.

The same year his daughter died

On April 18, 1919, fell the so-called Amritsar tragedy, which even to-day casts its shadow over the whole of India. Its causes were not only political, but also economic

The Government of India was aware of the existence of a revolutionary party in India, principally in Bengal, which, however, was numerically very small. For this reason at the beginning of the Great War the "Defence of India" Act was passed, giving the executive extensive power and considerably limiting personal freedom. In August 1917 the Secretary for India, E. S. Montagu, speaking in the name of the Coalition Government, promised India self-government within the British Empire. From this statement India conceived the hope that the promised reforms would bring political and economic relief. Economically, Indian trade enjoyed a very prosperous period immediately after the Great War. Profits were high, wages were increased, agricultural produce fetched relatively high prices, and the great landowners or *zamīndārs* obtained higher rents.

But soon the wave of prosperity began to ebb, the standard of living of industrial employees and peasants deteriorated, and discontent grew. Strikes became frequent. The Government, fearing still greater disturbances, took advantage of the "Defence of India" Act to have inconvenient individuals arrested and interned. Among those arrested at an earlier date had been Mrs. Annie Besant of the Theosophical Society, a protagonist of the rights of the Indian woman. Early in 1919 the so-called Rowlatt Acts for the suppression of terrorism were passed, which in the event of disturbances—a very elastic expression—authorized sentence without previous regular trial, the restriction of the freedom of suspected political characters and the prohibition of their writing for the papers or taking part in political meetings.

Indian politicians saw in these Acts not merely protection against terrorism, but also the limitation of regular political activities. On March 23rd Gandhi proclaimed that as a sign of protest against the Rowlatt Acts and of mourning for the disappointment of the Indian hopes in Montagu's promises all work should be suspended on April 6th. This interruption of all traffic and work (the so-called *hartāl*) was held in Delhi on March 30th, and there were riots. Gandhi went there to explain to the Indians what they should do, but on the way he was stopped and forbidden to enter the town. When he refused to obey this order, he was arrested. The news of his arrest aroused a storm in the Punjab. The Governor of Punjab, Sir Michael O'Dwyer, had two of the popular leaders arrested; when the populace stormily demanded their release a volley was fired

into the crowd. In the resulting riot a number of innocent Europeans were killed. General Dyer, a brave but excitable man, occupied the town on April 11th, and on the morning of the 12th had proclamations issued forbidding all meetings. On the afternoon of April 13th he was informed that a gathering of about 10,000 was being held at a place called Jallianvalabagh, bounded on all four sides by houses, to which the only approach was one narrow street. It is not certain whether the crowd, many of whom were illiterate, understood the meaning of the proclamation at all, it is not even certain whether the majority of those present knew of the proclamation which had been published only a few hours previously; finally it is not even certain whether the proclamation had been posted at the place in question, but the authorities feared a new revolt similar to the mutiny of 1857, so although the meeting was on the whole quiet, and although there were many women and children in the crowd, General Dyer had a volley fired into the crowd without previous warning. The gathering was seized with panic. About 380 people were killed, and about three times as many wounded, for it was impossible to escape. Martial law was proclaimed in the town and its surroundings, and the revolting villages in the neighbourhood were bombarded from the air. In addition, the Indians were humiliated by ignominious punishments.

The report of the excesses in the Punjab was not immediately spread all over the country. When this was done, however, India was full of mourning. Indians of noble birth suffered in silent protest. Rabindranath Tagore was the first to speak out fearlessly, and resigned

the title granted him four years before, announcing his decision in the following letter to the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford.

“YOUR EXCELLENCY,

“The enormity of measures taken by the Government of the Punjab for quelling some local disturbances, has, with a rude shock, revealed to our minds the helplessness of our position as British subjects in India. The disproportionate severity of the punishment inflicted upon the unfortunate people and the methods of carrying them out, we are convinced, are without parallel in the history of civilized governments, barring some conspicuous exceptions, recent or remote. Considering that such treatment has been meted out to a population, disarmed and resourceless, by a power which has the most terribly efficient organization for the destruction of human lives, we must strongly assert that it can claim no political expediency, far less moral justification. The accounts of the insults and sufferings undergone by our brothers in the Punjab have trickled through the gagged silence, reaching every corner of India, and the universal agony of indignation roused in the hearts of our people has been ignored by our rulers—possibly congratulating themselves for imparting what they imagine as a salutary lesson. This callousness has been praised by most of the Anglo-Indian papers, which have in some cases gone to the brutal length of making fun of our sufferings without receiving the least check from the same authority, relentlessly careful in smothering every cry of pain and expression of judgment from the organs representing the

Fame and World-wide Recognition

sufferers, knowing that our appeals have been in vain and that the passion of vengeance is blinding the noble vision of statesmanship of our Government, which could so easily afford to be magnanimous, as befitting its physical strength and moral tradition. The very least I can do for my country is to take all consequences upon myself in giving voice to the protest of the millions of my countrymen, surprised to a dumb anguish of terror. The time has come when badges of honour make our shame glaring in their incongruous contact of humiliation, and I for my part wish to stand, shorn of all special distinctions, by the side of those of my countrymen, who for their so-called insignificance, are liable to suffer a degradation not fit for human beings. And these are the reasons which have painfully compelled me to ask Your Excellency, with due deference and regret, to relieve me of my title of knighthood which I had the honour to accept from His Majesty the King at the hands of your predecessor, for whose nobleness of heart I still entertain great admiration

Yours faithfully,

RABINDRANATH TAGORE."

His request was not granted, but since then he has stopped using his title. His request caused some displeasure in Great Britain; this was the reason for the cool though courteous reception given to him in England during his next journey to Europe.

Under the influence of the group of authors who were connected with *Sabuyapatra* he wrote, in 1919, a collection of prose poems entitled *Lipikā* ("Sketches"). This work,

however, was not published until 1922. In the preface to a later, similar collection *Punaścha* ("And Again") Tagore tells that under the influence of English literature he tried to put something of the sweetness of poetry into prose diction. At the time, he says, he asked the young poet, Satyendranath Datta—who unfortunately died at an early age—for his opinion. Satyendranath approved of the idea, but did not himself try to put it into practice. The style of *Lipikā* is highly-polished and very economical of expression. Never verbose, in these sketches Tagore is doubly careful not to waste a word. He chose words containing no consonant groups, although the language is even normally very melodious. Each sentence is highly polished, the words seem to be cast of bell-metal and they are carefully chosen so that their sound is always in harmony with the brooding or fragile nature of the tale (cf. *The Footpath* or *Minu*). Occasionally we find slashing satire, as, for example, in the *Trial of the Horse* (cf. *Modern Review* for August 1919):

"Brahma, the creator, was very near the end of his task of creation when a new idea struck him.

He sent for the store-keeper and said, 'O keeper of the stores, bring to my factory a quantity of each of the five elements. For I am ready to create another creature.' 'Lord of the universe,' the store-keeper replied, 'when in the first flush of creative extravagance you began to turn out such exaggerations as elephants and whales and pythons and tigers, you took no account of the stock. Now, all the elements that have density and force are nearly used up. The supply of earth and water and fire

Fame and World-wide Recognition

has become inconveniently scanty, while of air and ether there is as much as is good for us and a good deal more.'

The four-headed deity looked perplexed and pulled at his four pairs of moustaches. At last he said: 'The limitedness of material gives all the more scope for originality. Send me whatever you have left.'

This time Brahma was excessively sparing with the earth, water and fire. The new creature was not given either horns or claws, and his teeth were only meant for chewing, not for biting. The prudent care with which fire was used in his formation made him necessary in war without making him warlike.

This animal was the Horse

The reckless expenditure of air and ether, which went into his composition, was amazing. And in consequence he perpetually struggled to outreach the wind, to outrun space itself. The other animals ran only when they have a reason, but the horse would run for nothing whatever, as if to run out of his own skin. He had no desire to chase, or to kill, but only to fly on and on till he dwindled into a dot, melted into a swoon, blurred into a shadow, and vanished into vacancy.

The Creator was glad. He had given for his other creatures habitations—to some the forests, to others the caves. But in his enjoyment of the disinterested spirit of speed in the Horse, he gave him an open meadow under the very eye of heaven.

By the side of this meadow lived Man.

Man has his delight in pillaging and piling things up. And he is never happy till these grow into a burden. So, when he saw this new creature pursuing the wind

Fame and World-wide Recognition

and kicking at the sky, he said to himself: 'If only I can bind and secure this Horse, I can use his broad back for carrying my loads'

So one day he caught the Horse.

Then man put a saddle on the Horse's back and a spiky bit in his mouth. He regularly had hard rubbing and scrubbing to keep him fit, and there were the whip and spurs to remind him that it was wrong to have his own will.

Man also put high walls round the Horse lest if left at large in the open the creature might escape him. So it came to pass, that while the Tiger who had his forest remained in the forest, the Lion who had his cave remained in the cave, the Horse who once had his open meadow came to spend his days in a stable. Air and ether had roused in the Horse longings for deliverance, but they swiftly delivered him into bondage.

When he felt that bondage did not suit him, the Horse kicked at the stable walls.

But this hurt his hoofs much more than it hurt the wall. Still some of the plaster came off and the wall lost its beauty.

Man felt aggrieved.

'What ingratitude!' he cried. 'Do I not give him food and drink? Do I not keep highly-paid men-servants to watch over him day and night? Indeed he is hard to please.'

In their desperate attempts to please the Horse, the men-servants fell upon him and so vigorously applied all their winning methods that he lost his power to kick and a great deal more besides.

Fame and World-wide Recognition

Then Man called his friends and neighbours together, and said to them exultingly, 'Friends, did you ever see so devoted a steed as mine?'

'Never,' they replied. 'He seems as still as ditch water and as mild as the religion you profess.'

The Horse, as is well known, had no horns, no claws, nor adequate teeth, at his birth. And, when on the top of this, all kicking at the walls and even into emptiness had been stopped, the only way to give vent to his feelings was to neigh.

But that disturbed Man's sleep.

Moreover, this neighing was not likely to impress the neighbours as a paean of devotion and thankfulness. So Man invented devices to shut the Horse's mouth.

But the voice cannot be altogether suppressed so long as the mistake is made of leaving any breath in the body. Therefore a spasmodic sound of moaning came from his throat now and then.

One day this noise reached Brahma's ears.

The Creator woke up from his meditation. It gave him a start when he glanced at the meadow and saw no sign of the Horse.

'This is all your doing,' cried Brahma, in anger to Yama, the god of death. 'You have taken away the Horse!'

'Lord of all creatures,' Death replied, 'all your worst suspicions you keep only for me. But most of the calamities in your beautiful world will be explained if you turn your eyes in the direction of Man.'

Brahma looked below. He saw a small enclosure, walled in, from which the dolorous moaning of his Horse came fitfully.

Fame and World-wide Recognition

Brahma frowned in anger.

'Unless you set free my Horse,' said he, 'I shall take care that he grows teeth and claws like the Tiger.'

'That would be ungodly,' cried Man, 'to encourage ferocity. All the same, if I may speak plain truth about a creature of your own make, this Horse is not fit to be set free. It was for his eternal good that I built him this stable—this marvel of architecture.'

Brahma remained obdurate.

'I bow to your wisdom,' said Man, 'but if, after seven days, you still think that your meadow is better for him than my stable, I will humbly own defeat.'

After this Man set to work

He made the Horse go free, but hobbled his front legs. The result was so vastly diverting that it was enough to make even a frog burst his sides with laughter.

Brahma, from the height of his heaven, could see the comic gait of his Horse, but not the tragic rope which hobbled him. He was mortified to find his own creature openly exposing its divine maker to ridicule.

'It was an absurd blunder of mine,' he cried, 'closely touching the sublime.'

'Grandsire,' said Man with a pathetic show of sympathy, 'what can I do for this unfortunate creature? If there is a meadow in your heaven, I am willing to take trouble to transport him thither.'

'Take him back to your stable!' cried Brahma in dismay.

'Merciful God,' cried Man, 'what a great burden it will be for mankind.'

'It is the burden of humanity,' muttered Brahma.'

Tagore's geocentric views had become still more pronounced. In *The King of the Dark Chamber* he says that the whole world is full of the "King" throughout. If, therefore, the earth is full of divinity, there is no need for heaven. This is humorously maintained in the last sketch of *Lipikā*, which described how the God Indra decided to leave heaven and live on earth.

Ten years afterwards, in July 1930, Tagore had a conversation with Einstein, which is recorded in the supplement to his *Religion of Man* (Tagore said that man is the foundation of everything, that without the human mind there would be nothing, neither beauty nor truth. Einstein agreed, as far as beauty was concerned, but not with regard to truth. Although the existence of truth independent of man cannot be proved, he said, he believes in it nevertheless. That, he said, is his religion. Tagore objected that even if it existed its existence would have no significance if there were no men in the world. "Then I am more religious than you are," Einstein replied.

.

Chapter Six

RESTLESSNESS

THE IDEA OF VIŚVABHĀRATĪ

EMBITTERED by the course events had taken Tagore left India in May 1920. He visited Great Britain, France, Holland, the United States, Switzerland, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Austria, and Czechoslovakia. This time there were no storms of enthusiasm in the United States and in Great Britain, but in the other countries he visited his reception was stormy, genuinely triumphant and sincerely cordial. He visited the countries of the favourite poets of his youth and made the acquaintance of prominent authors and statesmen. He lectured with great success. His lectures were crowded by listeners of all classes. The pleasant modulation of his voice and his appearance, reminiscent of an Old Testament prophet, captured the hearts of his hearers. He visited Czechoslovakia at the invitation of the Charles University, where he lectured, on June 18, 1921, on the religion of the Bauls ("An Indian Folk Religion"). This lecture was later reprinted in Tagore's *Creative Unity*.

The Bauls are a religious sect without a definite organization, and include both homeless pilgrims and village and town dwellers. They know no differences of caste, have no temples nor places of pilgrimage; neither do they make images of their gods. They accept as

Restlessness

members even the lowest-class Hindus and Moham-medans. To the Bauls man is God's instrument, perfectly tuned to express eternal truth in the music of life. He is the sanctuary of the Supreme Being, therein, in their eyes, lies man's dignity. If a human body appears not to be God's temple, it means that his lamp is not yet lit. When the light of his love shows every man that the bodies of other men, too, are God's temples, universal communion with God will be achieved. They consider that the body should be decently covered, and therefore wear long white robes. Their religious views are in many ways akin to those of the Mahayana Buddhists. The songs of the Bauls, which are full of mystic warmth and musical appeal, are handed down by word of mouth from master to pupil. When questioned they frequently answer in song. Asked why his robe is not dyed as are those of the Indian ascetics, a Baul answered:

“Can the colour show outside, unless the inside is first
tinctured’

Can fruit attain ripe sweetness by the painting of its
skin’”

Their unsatisfied longing for union with God is expressed in the following Baul song

“Where shall I meet him, the man of my heart?

He is lost to me and I seek him wandering from land
to land.

I am listless for that moon-rise of beauty,

Which is to light my life,

Which I long to see in fulness of vision,

In gladness of heart.”

The ordinary investigator finds difficulty in recording their songs. Tagore met them in villages, knew them by name, discoursed with them and heard them sing. He said that their song charmed him as soon as he listened to it attentively. Their songs are simple and lose much of their charm if words and music are not heard together.

Tagore held a further lecture in Prague, at the German University, on June 23rd, on the mission of the Indian forests, in other words the forest schools of India, and expressed the wish that the seats of European learning should imitate the *gurukuls*, in which youths of noble family and others of humble origin sat together in complete harmony at the feet of their teacher, under whose guidance they were consecrated to the service of the goddess of wisdom.

Tagore's letters to C. F. Andrews, an intimate friend of his, furnish us with his personal comments on this journey. He wrote every week, often twice weekly, during the whole period of his journey, long letters recording his impressions and commenting on current events. There is a fatherly care in the words. "There is one thing about which I wish to speak to you. Keep Śantiniketan away from the turmoils of politics." Four years later C. F. Andrews published these letters under the title *Rabindranath Tagore's Letters from Abroad* (Madras, 1924).*

A year later, on Tagore's return from his European journey in July 1921, the first phase of the passive resistance movement was at its height. This time it embraced

* London Edition by George Allen and Unwin, Ltd. *Letters to a Friend*.

wide masses of the population. Tagore took no part in it, although Gandhi tried to persuade him. He never agreed to the isolation of India. On the contrary, he stated that all that is great and genuine in mankind is waiting at the gates of India for admission. It does not befit the Indians, he said, to ask from what country the greatness and truth come, they should take them both in and in return offer the world India's best. He had the courage to lift up his voice against the general opinion of nationalist India, although by so doing his popularity with many of his fellow-countrymen suffered.

The sixtieth year of his life came, and Autumn brought threads of silver to his hair. His world had widened during the Great War, and still more after it. His untamable desire to penetrate to distant regions of the world, expressed years ago graphically in the poem *Duranta āśā*, was given free rein. This he wished to be reflected in the changed spirit of Śāntiniketan, which was very dear to him and which received the proceeds of his writings. The basic Indian national school was to be extended. In conformity with his philosophy, which advocates a synthesis between East and West, and that the East should give its best to the West and in return assimilate the best that Western civilization can give it, Tagore tried to make Śāntiniketan a meeting-place for teachers and students who desire to learn to know the various Asiatic and European civilizations. During Tagore's journey to Japan and the United States in 1916 and 1917, and later through Europe and the United States in 1920 and 1921, he saw that everywhere his

poems were welcomed to an extent that he had never hoped for. He realized that this placed a great responsibility on him, and therefore began to try to find a point of contact for East and West beyond the boundaries of politics, race and religion. The hospitality of Śāntiniketan was to be extended without limit to all who come from the West to study the East and vice versa.

In December 1921, therefore, a new institution was attached to the national school at Śāntiniketan "*Viśva-bhārati*" or "International University" Its purpose was to cultivate the ideals of humanity in general and above all to study the many different civilizations of the East, to strive for a closer understanding between East and West, and by means of an exchange of ideas between the two worlds to improve the conditions for world-peace. The new institution's motto was the Sanscrit sentence *yatra viśvaṃ bhavaty ekaṇīdam* ("Where the whole world meets in one place"). In Śāntiniketan, therefore, the thoughts of Rammohan, Ramakrishṇa, and Vivekananda found a new, purer and profounder expression.

The idea is a sublime one, and Tagore justly said at the end of his opening speech:

"Viśvabharati is a great idea, though it has appeared in our midst in a material shape which is small. The arrival of the Great in the disguise of the very little, however, happens every day in life. Let us therefore rejoice in the fact of its coming, let the auspicious music be sounded. Let us earnestly hope that this infant is the messenger bringing Amṛita from the gods, that

this nectar of divine life will make it live from within, make it grow, and also make us live and grow into fulness."

This gave Śantiniketan a new and responsible mission. Tagore's noble endeavours assumed concrete form and live a life of their own. Unfortunately his efforts were not sufficiently appreciated, either in India or in Europe. The noble old man was compelled to visit and appeal to the wealthy men of his country not to allow his great idea to perish. He gladly fulfils this painful duty for the sake of his country and humanity.

Viśvabharatī, which publishes its own scientific journal, to-day called *Viśvabhārātī Quarterly*, is no ordinary institution. There is something indescribable and mysteriously attractive in its atmosphere, the same spell that Mahārṣi Debendranath succumbed to, when he chose Śantiniketan, out of all India, for his retirement. Peace blooms in the shadow of the trees. The gay and unhampered community between teachers and pupils, the moonlight songs, the whisper of the trees and the blue sky above them give the visitor a feeling of contact with the infinite and of the presence of God, "the great Giver, who can reveal the whole world to a man in a single narrow street" All the inhabitants of the *āśram* do reverence to Man in the person of the poet, creating an atmosphere of spiritual affinity between man and man.

Tagore's activities as an educator of these children led him to the poetical interpretation of the thoughts, opinions and fancies of boys and girls and their small worries in *Śiśu Bholānāth*.

A boy watches a palm whose leaves are always trembling; it seems to think, he says, that it is a bird

Restlessness

and to wish to fly away into the sky; but when the wind falls, the movement of the leaves ceases too, and its thoughts return to earth; once more it loves its own corner of the world. A small astronomer asked his mother who are those stars in the sky that look so strangely at our world. Probably they have no feet, and so cannot come down to earth; but he himself has no wings and cannot fly up to them. How they would enjoy playing on the terrace of his house and being put to bed afterwards by his mother! Another boy ponders on the words of his uncle, that everyone goes to the nearest place to heaven when the time comes and the ferryman rings his bell. His aunt, he says, doubts whether that is true, but his father really left that way. The boy wants to stay with his arm round his mother's neck all night, for he does not believe that heaven is as beautiful as earth is. No, he does not want to go to heaven, he prefers to stay on earth in his aunt's house.

The poem *I Cannot Remember my Mother* is full of deep feeling.

["I cannot remember my mother,
only sometimes in the midst of my play
a tune seems to hover over my playthings,
the tune of some song, that she used to hum while
rocking my cradle.

I cannot remember my mother,
but when in the early autumn morning
the smell of the *siuli* flowers floats in the air
the scent of the morning service in the temple comes
to me as the scent of my mother.

- ✓ I cannot remember my mother,
only when from my bedroom window
I send my eyes into the blue of the distant sky
I feel that the stillness of my mother's gazing on my
face has spread all over the sky."
(Translated by the poet himself, see]
Viśvabhāratī Quarterly, vol. 11 (1936), p. 22.)

Even in the early dramas *Bisarjan* and *Rājā* the reader has the impression that the author is more interested in vivifying ideas than in human life. His treatment of the ancient theme of the "Prayaśchitta" in *Muktadhārā* ("Free Current"), published in 1922, bears fresh witness to this.

Bibhuti, engineer to the court of Uttarakuṭ, finally succeeds in harnessing a mountain stream, building a dam with a mighty engine, and the completion of his work is to be celebrated in the outer court of the temple of Śiba, over which towers the new machine built by human hands. The construction involved the loss of human lives, many workmen were carried away by the current. Bibhuti, in his pride, says that their sacrifice was not in vain. Prince Abhijit rebukes him for this, his main complaint is that Bibhuti has taken the water which the inhabitants of Śibtaray need for themselves. It is no wonder that some discontent can be observed in this region, for where there is oppression there can be no calm. King Ranjit relieves Prince Abhijit of the administration of the Śibtaray province, saying that he has too much sympathy for the misery of the people; Prince Abhijit is thrown into prison, accused of having first won over the population of Śibtaray and now

desiring to possess himself of the throne. A woman of the people correctly objects that the throne is of no value to the prince since he has won the hearts of all the inhabitants of Śibtaray. But the selfish inhabitants of Uttarakut, who live on the toil of the people of Śibtaray, plan to attempt his life. By putting him in prison the king in reality saved his life. But the prison is set on fire and the prince escapes. In vain, therefore, the people of Uttarakut demand that he be yielded up to them, and in vain they of Śibtaray claim his liberation. By this time the prince is already at liberty and has destroyed the machine and the dam, although he knew that he would lose his life in the process. But he did not shirk the task, for the destruction of the monstrous machine frees the inhabitants of both Śibtaray and Uttarakut.

In this play the author tries to solve the problem of the expediency of machinery, the possibilities of which have cast such a spell on mankind. Gandhi condemned all machines (with the exception of the sewing-machine, which, he says, considerably lightens the work of the Indian woman), and overlooked the toil-reducing mission of the machine. Tagore does not endorse this theory, condemning only the machine which is not true to its mission and brings misery to individuals or communities and encourages the selfishness of the few. Some passages of the play are full of beauty. The wise judgment of the citizens, which accompanies the whole action of the play like a Greek chorus, is a powerful dramatic element in the play.

Tagore's English lectures, held in a number of countries

Restlessness

during his last journey to the West, were published in 1922 under the title of *Creative Unity*. This book, which is full of wisdom, elucidates Tagore's personal attitude to some of the problems of the day and summarizes his views on many a question.

In the poet's eyes this world is a manifestation of the infinite, the morning's song of the joy of the new-born day and the evening stars' message to the tired pilgrim of the victory of life in fresh birth awaken man to a feeling of obligation to manifest truth and infinity in himself. By reminding him of the divine essence in himself they compel him to collaborate with God in the improvement of the world. Man's ideal, he says, should be the dynamic creation of beauty. He praises the old Indian thinkers' teaching of cosmic unity as the ultimate truth, and their belief that the realization of this truth brings man into harmony with the infinite and assures the happiness of the individual. He complains that the European travelling in the East selects instances which displease him and draws incorrect conclusions from them, using them against the East. Another error is that the traveller comes into the country, but has no contact with its people. On both sides the great hindrance to mutual understanding is the social atmosphere. The real East is still undiscovered, for the West does not understand it; Western travellers come to the Orient full of egoism, full of political and economic cannibalism. To-day, after the Great War, the East asks, full of astonishment, whether the celebrated grandeur of the West is really great. Kipling's well-known words that East and West shall never meet are only correct in so

far as no signs of true contact have yet been manifested, and the reason is that the West sent the East not its humanity, but machines. Kipling's words should therefore read: "Man is man, machine is machine, and never the twain shall meet." Tagore praises the old times, when man's spiritual attributes were appreciated and cultivated; he condemns the race for wealth, condemns the organized selfishness of individuals and communities, condemns hedonism and the oppression of individuality in the present day. He urges his countrymen to ask themselves whether they long for true liberty or only for external comfort, whether they are willing to train the minds of their children to the ideal of human dignity, which will not suffer unjust restriction. Genuine freedom, he says, must come from within and is no matter of externals. Tagore's opinion of the "nation" is well known from his *Nationalism*. The nations, he says, are the mere organization of power; there is a difference, therefore, between the living spirit of a people and the methods of an organized nation. He firmly believes that this age of nationalism is merely a period of transition, that the days of collective selfishness are numbered and that the time is coming when there will be communion governed by a spirit of truth and by a sincere desire for harmonious collaboration. Being in favour of international collaboration, he warmly approves of the idea of the League of Nations. He sees with pleasure that the awakening of Asia is in progress. As modern methods of communication have brought the East nearer to the West, a place must be found in Asia for contact between the civilizations of the East and those of the West—for its own sake and

for that of the rest of the world the East must make its influence felt. In such a place there must be no opposing interests; there learned men of all countries and continents must reveal concealed secrets, thinkers must solve the problems of life, artists create objects of beauty and holy men sanctify their life by truth and be a light to others—not for the benefit of a single country, but for that of the whole world. In Śāntiniketan Tagore tried to found a university which should constitute the nucleus of such a place.

In Tagore's dramatic work the plays celebrating the seasons of the year take a special place. They contain little action, but are thickly studded with lyric songs which constitute the main part of the play, the tunes are composed by the author himself. They are performed by talented actors chosen from the ranks of the pupils of Śāntiniketan and by Tagore himself, such performances are ranked as important literary events. Some of these plays have therefore several versions. In 1922 Tagore considerably extended *Śāradsab*, rewrote *Phālgunī*, giving it the new title of *Basantotsab* ("Spring Festival") and wrote *Barshamangal* ("Festival of the Rains"). In the latter play, as in the melodrama *Śeshbarshan* ("The Last Rains"), written in 1925, he emphasizes the regenerative and life-giving power of the rainy period. To these plays should be added *Natarāj* (King of the Dance, an attribute of Śiva), written in 1927, and *Nabīn* and *Sundar*, which also praise the beauty and power of nature.

In his *Spring Festival* spring is welcomed by the song of the earth, the bamboo grove, the mango orchards,

Restlessness

the avenues of *śāla* limes, the *bakul* tree, flowers, the river, wind, the lamp and the forest path. The play is preceded by the following witty prologue:

“King: Poet!

Poet: What, great king?

King: I have run away from the meeting of my ministers.

Poet: Well done. But how did Your Majesty come to have such a good idea?

King: The end of the year is near, the treasury is nearly empty. Whenever you sit in council the ministers want money for their departments. So there is nothing for it but to flee.

Poet: It is all to the good!

King: Whose?

Poet: The kingdom's.

King: What did you say?

Poet: If the king stands aside from time to time, his people get a chance to govern.

King: What do you mean?

Poet: When a king is at the end of his resources, his people start to look into theirs and the situation is saved.

King: Poet, your words seem twisted. I have left the council of my ministers, have I to leave you now?

Poet: No, there is no need for that. If you have wandered astray, you have become one of us.

King: One of you?

Poet: Yes, we are born vagrants.

Sings:

Restlessness

We are men without a home,
Like rain on a lotus leaf,
We go from place to place
And our wanderings are as free as the wind.

King. You wish to get me to join your people? I shan't be able to go so far. But after all, all my ministers have done their best to make me leave the council, so if I join the poet's troupe . . .

Poet. You see me only, but do not fear, with us you will be in royal company.

King: In royal company? Tell me, what king will be there?

Poet. The king of the weather!

King. The king of the weather? Do you mean the Spring?

Poet. Yes, great king. For a long time he has wandered. As we wander. The earth enthroned him, wanting to make him ruler of the world, but he . . .

King: Escapes too, I suppose, when he sees that his royal treasures are empty.

Poet. He flees when he has filled the treasures of the earth.

King. Why? Is he afraid?

Poet. Not afraid, glad!

King. Poet, leave your puzzles. If my teachers heard them they would be angry, they say already that there is no sense in them. But tell me, what play have you prepared for to-day's Spring festival?

Poet. To-day we are playing at fugitives

Restlessness

King: Splendid, splendid! Shall I be able to understand it?

Poet: I have not tried to make it understandable.

King: But did you try to make it incomprehensible?

Poet. No, great king, there is no particular meaning in it, there is in truth no question of understanding or not understanding, they are mere songs.

King: Well then, start! But there is my council over there; if the ministers hear the voices. . . .

Poet: Yes, great king, they might join the troupe of vagrants too. What would it matter? Phalgun has begun.

King: Heaven forbid! If they came back here. . . .

Poet: Have no fear! It is true that to remember empty coffers is the duty of ministers, but to make people forget empty coffers is the duty of the poet.

King: Then it's all right. But don't wait. It is highly necessary to forget. Is the troupe ready? Our theatre manager Dinapati. . .

Poet: Is sitting here overcome by the odour of honey from the lotus grove of the goddess of wisdom.

King: It really seems that he does not worry a bit that the royal treasury is empty.

Poet: He is a friend of our festival, on hungry days we cannot do without him, for his nectar makes us forget our hunger.

King: Excellent! He must meet my ministers, especially my minister of finance. He looks very serious. If Dinapati can make his thoughts a little gayer. . . .

Poet: Do not give him too much hope at once. What the state of the royal treasury is. . . .

Restlessness

King: Of course, of course! Good, but how do you want to start your play, then?

Poet: The call has come from heaven to be ready, that Spring is coming.

King: What call?

Poet: It says that everything must be given.

King: So that nothing would be left? For heaven's sake!

Poet: No! So that a man gets rich. Otherwise giving is only for show.

King: What does that mean?

Poet: The gift which is genuine makes a man rich. Its gifts at the Spring festival will make the earth rich.

King: Then there is a difference between the country and its ruler. If I give something away I usually get into difficulties—the minister of finance looks extremely serious.

Poet: A genuine gift means a loss of visible wealth, but an increase of spiritual wealth.

King: What's that again? That sounds like a sermon, poet.

Poet: Then don't let's wait, on with the song!"

The problem already encountered in the dramas *Rājā* and *Achalāyatan* is treated once more in *Rakta karabī* ("The Red Oleanders"). The play, which is apparently symbolic and as if tinged with the character of a fairy tale, in point of fact portrays, in kaleidoscopic pictures, but firmly and consistently, the struggle of life against that which destroys and stifles it. Some similarity with Maeterlinck cannot be denied. The spirit of life in this play is Nandini, who alone moves freely in the midst

Restlessness

of restrictions and limitations; the town of Jakshapuri is surrounded by a wire fence, and its inhabitants, robbed of all individuality, are merely nameless robots, distinguished only by numbers and letters. The town is kept in servitude by an invisible king, who is the symbol of everything that stifles true life. The manifold nature of life holds many dangers which threaten to destroy life. One of these is conservatism, another is organized selfishness, which has enslaved everybody, the murmurings of the populace contain many a grain of truth, but their longing to free themselves from the bonds of this mechanical selfishness is in vain. Nandini dreams of Ranjan, who represents the generation of new thoughts, and comes disregarding all threats; although Ranjan himself dies, his idea conquers, and even the "king" is willing to take part in the destruction of the gates of the prison, heralding a victorious future

In 1924 Tagore left India for the sixth time, visiting Malaya, China and Japan. Speaking in China he recalled the manifold cultural ties between China and India in the past, and that the apostles of Buddha's teaching of peace and love came to China from India. These ancient values undoubtedly still dwell in the hearts of the people of that country, for the words of the great Indian found a lively echo there. Tagore believes that Asia must seek strength in unity, not in a contest with the West in selfishness and brutality. His lectures in China were published in 1925. The writer himself does not agree with Tagore's opinion that Asia must seek strength in Asiatic union. If India seeks strength and support in union, it is more likely to find it in union with the West,

for Western civilization is more closely ~~akin to Indian~~. It is probable that the early ancestors of the Indians of to-day came from Europe, and in spite of their subsequent isolated development in Asia the Indians of to-day are closely related to it. By the whim of destiny India has now once more been brought into contact with Europe, and it would be advantageous to both India and Europe for these cultural ties to be preserved, the influence of India on Europe and of Europe on India would be beneficial to both. But Europe must change its attitude towards India. India, a country with a very old civilization and a profound understanding of the unity of the world, has its mission in the world. As Tagore finely says, India, aware of its wealth, need not face Europe with the empty hands of a beggar, for it is fully entitled to offer its hand in friendly greeting. Tagore believes that the scene of the drama of history, in which each nation takes a part, may soon change; there is no doubt, he says, that we are living at the end of an important epoch. The dawn of Asia's awakening, he says, is already beginning to lighten the eastern sky. In the glow topping the mountains of the East Tagore sees great portents.

In 1924 Tagore left for Peru, being invited to the celebration of the centenary of its independence, but, falling ill, he returned from Buenos Aires by way of Italy.

It was at this time that he wrote his melancholy play *Grihaprabeś* ("Entering a New House"). The theme of this play differs from that of the majority of the poet's works, many of which are devoted to a woman's self-sacrifice. In *Grihaprabeś*, however, it is the husband, Yatin, who sacrifices himself for the sake of his beautiful

but capricious wife Mani, who abandons him. Exhausting all his resources, Yatin builds her a beautiful house; in his illness, he dreams of the ceremony of entering the new house. His aunt—in Bengali literature the aunt is taken as the type of a kindly woman—excuses the young woman's hardness of heart and manages to arrange that Yatin at least sees Mani approaching him in his last moments, although Mani does not come to the bed of her dying husband out of the desire of a loving heart.

Tagore has used the same theme in a previous story, *The Last Night*.

Purabī (the name of an early evening tune) is a collection of poems written on various occasions, including his impressions of his journey through Europe and South America. On May 6th (according to the Indian calendar the twenty-fifth day of the month of *baīśākhī*), his birthday, he received a loving message "written in the clear flush of dawn," reminding him that his past and his future were full of births and deaths. In infinite space and in the infinite music of light his heart dances in harmony with the rhythm of the world. His birthday, which is sometimes accompanied by the golden blossoms of the mango trees, sometimes by a wind sweeping away dry leaves or even an evening storm, to-day whispers to him smiling of his innumerable births and of the victory of life, an endless and ever-recurring miracle of eternity. Eternity sometimes measures the span of a man's life meanly, as in the case of Satyendranath Datta, to whose poetic talent he pays a great tribute. Satyendranath came after him, he says, and preceded him in death, but he blazed like a meteor. Life

Restlessness

is nothing but a pilgrimage whose goal is death, but death is only "the summons to a pilgrim," it is not cruel; for in death's smile there mingles with a song at parting the call of a fresh Spring.

The Ruined Temple is a theme which Tagore had already treated and which he here regards from another angle. It does not matter that the precincts of the temple are not filled by pilgrims desirous of religious merit, that no one kindles the lights, brings sacrificial flowers and burns scented sandalwood. Instead, the south wind sings in its crumbling corridors, bringing the scent of the woods, filling its courts with forest flowers and plants, and birds fly in to announce to its sanctuaries the Spring of life. The ascetics and religious departed, thinking that God no longer dwells within its walls, although at that very moment its floors were sanctified by the divine presence. The poet frequently discusses the value of pain: when the heart is full of mourning and evil days, and the gateway of escape is closed on the outside, man finds his best solace in the secrecy of his own soul, discovers the deathless flame that burns within him and finds that heaven itself is hidden in his heart.

In Buenos Aires an unknown flower inspired him to write the following poem:

A Foreign Flower

O foreign flower, when I asked your name
You smiled and shook your head; I understood
Your name was naught to you.
In your smiles alone can one know you, and nowhere
else

Restlessness

O foreign flower, I pressed you to my heart
And asked you where you dwell, you did but smile,
Shaking your head, and said:

"I do not know."

I understood that to learn it would not help me,
That your place is in the heart of your lovers,
And nowhere else.

O foreign flower, I whispered into your ears:

"What language do you speak?"

You did but smile and shook your head,
The leaves rustled all round.

I said: "I think I know the language of fragrance
That silently tells your hopes."

My breath is full of the language of your breath.

O foreign flower, when first I saw your face

I asked you "Do you know me?"

You smiled and shook your head;

I thought that it does not matter, and asked you
whether you knew

That your touch fills my heart with sweetness.

Who knows me better than my heart does,

O foreign flower?

"Tell me, O foreign flower," I asked, "will you forget
me soon?"

You smiled and shook your head; I know

You will think of me now and again.

Two days from now I shall go away.

But far away, in your dreams, I'll be familiar to you;

You will not forget me quite.

The play *Śodh-bodh* ("The Reckoning"), which was written in 1925, after Tagore's return from South America, is a caricature of those Bengalis who ape Europeans, whose wavering characters are a nucleus of moral decay. The genuinely progressive man acquires from observation of the West a free mind, not merely slavish submission to fashion. Satis' father, a respectable Bengali, disagrees with his wife, who encourages her son in his false imitation of everything European. Nalini, too, who comes of a rich family, although she herself has enjoyed a European education, blames Satis for this, although in her heart she is by no means indifferent to him. Satis hoped to inherit the wealth of his childless uncle, but his hopes are disappointed when a son is born to his uncle. Satis' father dies, leaving his fortune to philanthropic institutions, and Satis is left without resources. He has, it is true, a position found him by his uncle, but in view of the changed conditions he tries to pay back his entire debt to his uncle and aunt and imprudently misappropriates official funds. His precarious position comes home to him and he sees the only way out in suicide. But in the anguish of his mind he wishes to commit a murder as well—to shoot his little cousin, the ignorant cause of the failure of his life. But his noble-minded uncle prevents him, promising him help and the pardon of the authorities for his deed, Nalini, refusing a rich suitor, agrees to marry Satis, whose moral redemption is thereby assured.

In this play Tagore turns his attention to the problems of modern life. It is not impossible that the dramatic art of the West had some influence here, just as the

environment in which his characters move is influenced by Western education. The play is very dramatic, the characters are well drawn, the effect of the characterization is enhanced by the fact that the author makes the educated characters speak an anglicized Bengali; the conversation between Nalini and her friend, Lahidi, is full of English expressions such as "propose *karā*" (propose marriage), "congratulate *karā*" (congratulate) and "*khub* admire *karā*" (to admire very much). The action of the play is very rapid, as will be seen from the following extract showing the climax of the conflict

Satis I have loaded this pistol with two bullets—that's enough. My last beloved!—Who is it? Haren, what are you doing? So late in the evening, out in the garden in the dark! There is nobody near Run away, run away quickly! (Strikes his forehead) Satis, what are you thinking about? Curse! Be still, be still! No, no, what am I thinking about? Have I gone mad? Who is there? Is any of the servants there? No, there's nobody here at all! Do you hear, aunt? Oh, he will roll about on the ground! I can no longer control my hand. What can I do with my hand? (Satis takes a stick and thrashes the flowerbeds violently again and again. This only increases his agitation. Finally he strikes himself vigorously across the arm, but feels no pain. Then he takes a pistol from his pocket and rushes up to Haren.)

Haren (wonderingly): What's the matter, what's the matter, brother? Please, brother, don't tell father that I've picked unripe peaches.

Satis (cries out) Uncle, save him now, don't wait, save your son in time!

Śaśadhar (runs up): What's the matter, Satis, what's the matter?

Sukumari (runs up). What's the matter, Satis, what's the matter?

Haren. Nothing, mother, nothing at all. Satis is joking.

Sukumari: What a stupid joke! You ought to be ashamed of yourself! Everything you do is bad. My heart is bursting. Satis seems to have got drunk.

Satis. Run away, run away with your son, or you will be lost! (Sukumari quickly disappears with Haren.)

Śaśadhar. Satis, don't be excited. Tell me what you want. You called to me to save Haren—from whom?

Satis. From me (Shows the pistol.) Look, uncle.
(Bīdhumukhi runs up.)

Bīdhumukhi. Satis, what misfortune have you brought on us, tell me? Your chief has come from the office with the police to search our house. If you want to escape, do it at once! I have not sinned, O God, why does so much misfortune fall on my head?

Satis: Don't worry, I have a means of escape in my hand

Śaśadhar. So you. . . .

Satis: Yes, uncle. It is just as you think. I paid my debt to aunt by stealing. I am a thief. Mother, you will be pleased that I am a thief, that I am a murderer. You need weep no longer. Go away, go away, leave me! I can't bear anybody near me!

Śaśadhar. Satis, you owe me something too. Pay me before you go!

Satis. Tell me, how can I pay? What can I give? What do you want?

Śaśadhar: That pistol.

Satiś: Here, take it. I will go to prison. Otherwise the debt of my sins will never be paid.

Śaśadhar. Satiś, sins cannot be paid for by punishment, they must be paid for by deeds. Believe me, if I ask your superior, he will not have you put in prison. From to-day live a fuller, better life!

Satiś Uncle, you do not know how hard it is for me to live!

Śaśadhar: Nevertheless you must live. That is the payment of your debts to me. You cannot cheat me and run away.

Satiś. Well then!

Śaśadhar Listen to what I ask of you. Forgive your mother and your aunt.

Bidhumukhi. Son, if it is not my destiny that you should forgive me, it does not matter. May God forgive you! I am going to see your aunt, to beg her pardon.
(Goes)

Śaśadhar Well, come, Satiś, you will eat with us to-day.

Nalini (running up). Satiś!

Satiś What's the matter, Nalini?

Nalini. What is the meaning of this? Why did you write me this letter?

Satiś. It means just what you understand it to mean. I did not write in order to deceive you. But because I am unlucky, everything is upset. I suppose you think that I have—to excite your pity—but my uncle will witness that I have not been joking—and after all, if you don't believe me I still have time to carry out my promise.

Restlessness

Nalini. Why are you talking like a lunatic? What have I done to you to deserve such a cruel . . .

Satis. Nalini, you know why I have made this decision. I have not kept anything from you. Do you still believe me?

Nalini. Believe you! Satis, that's why I am angry with you. Believe you. . . . Many people believe a man in this world. I have done the same as you. There is no difference between you and me. Look, I have brought all my jewels. They are not my own yet, they still belong to my parents. I took them without asking. I do not know how much I will get for them, but cannot they save you?

Śaśadhar. He will be saved, Satis will be saved by the treasure which you have given him with your jewels.

Nalini. Oh, there's Śaśadhar! Excuse me, babu, in my haste I . . .

Śaśadhar. Never mind, my daughter! Bad sight afflicts not only old men like me—at your age one does not notice an old man like me. I see that your superior is coming, Satis! I will go and have a talk with him. Afterwards you will be my guest. You can hold this pistol now, my daughter.

Natir pūjā ("The Worship of the Dancing Girl"), a four-act play, was written at the same time. The palace dancing-girl, Śrīmatī, full of religious fervour, celebrates Buddha's birthday although she knows that she is inviting death, for King Ajataśatru, an enemy of Buddhism, has forbidden the worship of the Master under pain of death. Similar self-sacrifice is the theme of the

Restlessness

short play *Chandālikā*, written seven years later, which is based on the old Buddhist tale of Prakriti, an outcaste girl, and how she offered water to Ananda, Buddha's favourite disciple, and fell in love with him (compare the poem *At the Well*, page 142). In this play Tagore uses this theme to show the moral strength and the depth of true love of which even an outcaste girl is capable, and that Indian social order is unjust in considering this class impure. Is not a flower, although outwardly covered by the dust of the road, without a blemish underneath?

The two succeeding years were almost entirely filled by journeys abroad. Tagore's sensitive spirit, which suffered under the chaotic condition of Indian internal politics, sought peace abroad. In May 1926 he was invited to visit Italy. After Italy he visited Switzerland, Austria, France, Britain, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Roumania, Turkey, Greece, and Egypt.

In Italy he was very cordially received by Mussolini. The country's material prosperity impressed him very favourably. In conversation with Italian journalists the poet of love and philosopher of peace between the nations is said to have spoken enthusiastically of the movement which strives for the expansion which he expressly condemned in his *Nationalism*. According to the Italian papers this uncompromising prophet of true democracy is said to have adopted an attitude of compromise, saying that fascism is unsuitable for other countries, but that for Italy it means much, and prophesying that it will take a very important place in the history of Italy.

In a letter (subsequently published) to his friend Andrews in England, Tagore says that conversation with Press reporters is a dangerous trap, which not only catches, but also mutilates our careless expressions of opinion. Words which are merely the expression of a carefree mood deserve to be forgotten; if photographically recorded, our thoughts are very frequently reproduced in some grotesque form as the irony of chance. As in this case the camera is another living being, the reproduction is a composition, the unequal marriage of two dissimilar opinions, which in all probability will be unhappy and undignified. Tagore's conversations with reporters in Italy were the product of three people: the reporter, the interpreter and Tagore himself. Over and above all this the constant murmur of a fourth element, general conversation, was distinctly in evidence, and interfered with all his discussions without his knowledge. Moreover, not knowing Italian, he had no means of controlling the result of this concoction. The only precaution he could take was to repeat again and again to his listeners that he had had no opportunity as yet of making himself familiar with the history and nature of fascism.

At the end of the year he returned to India, but July of next year saw him embark once more for foreign shores. This ninth journey took him to Malaya, Java, Bali and Siam. His unquenchable thirst for knowledge of foreign countries and civilizations is comprehensible if one considers his profound conviction of the bonds of brotherhood which unite him with the whole world and the fertile soil of his universalism. He yielded to this

Restlessness

mysterious force, which compelled him to a continual search for hidden things. He is thoroughly aware of the unrest in his heart and does not shirk the recognition that it ruins his peace of mind.

During his journey he was frequently asked to write a line or two on a fan or a piece of silk. This was the origin of *Fireflies*, witty sayings, short verses mostly of two to four lines.

“Gods, tired of their paradise, envy man.”

“God loves to see in me, not his servant,
but himself who serves all.”

“The worm thinks it strange and foolish
that man does not eat his books ”

“When death comes and whispers to me
‘Thy days are ended,’
Let me say to him ‘I have lived in love,
And not in mere time.’
He will ask ‘Will thy songs remain’
I shall say, ‘I know not, but this I know
That often when I sang I found my eternity.’ ”

In pre-war years the foreign literature which most influenced Bengali writers was undoubtedly English. But after the war the younger generation turned its eyes towards other countries, particularly Russia, claiming that in spirit these countries are more closely akin to their own. At present new tendencies are making themselves felt, Russian authors like Turgenieff, Dostoiewski

and Gorki are read, and post-war Russian writers, too, have their public. The schizophrenic characters of Dostoevski and Gorki make a considerable impression on the Bengali, who is fond of exalting his petty troubles and ineffectiveness as well as his more important worries, is given to self-pity and demands it of others. The younger writers, therefore, turn their eyes to the harsh realities of everyday life in Bengali town and country. Tagore, they say, although they admit that his novels and short stories describe Bengali life, transports it to a universal stage and is therefore not in the true sense of the world a Bengali author. Young writers like Śailaja Mukherjee, a simple country teacher of no great education, in realistic descriptions of the hard life of a miner, Achinta Sengupta, in expositions of the problems which face a modern Bengali, Ajit Datta, whose writings deal with the burning question of sex, and the realist Premendra Mitra, are in closer affinity to the realistic novelist Śaratchandra Chatterjee and in conscious opposition to Tagore.

But Tagore has shown in his novel *Śesher kabitā* that he, too, can deal with the burning problems of modern Bengali life.

Śesher kabitā ("Last Poem"), written in 1928, is a romance of young people who are not fully aware of their own feelings. It gives us a glimpse of the life of the *jeunesse dorée* of Calcutta. Tagore's novels will one day be a reliable source of information about the social life of contemporary Calcutta, particularly the classes with a European education. The plot of *Śesher kabitā* is full of contemporary colouring, which gives the novel

remarkable and expressive vitality. Amita Ray, son of a well-to-do lawyer, studied at the University of Calcutta and concluded his study of the law at Oxford. He stayed there so long, however, that he was unable to rid himself of the veneer of European education when he returned home. He was a talented but blasé young man, who always tried to swim against the tide. He argued warmly, for example, that the literary cult of the poet Rabindranath Tagore is a relic of the past, and exalted one Nibaran Chakrabarti as the greatest poet of the age, giving specimens of the latter's harsh poetry. In Summer he went to Shillong and not to Darjeeling, the usual resort of the educated classes in Bengal. As a result of a motor-car accident he made the acquaintance of Labanya, a girl very different from the average type. When her father, headmaster of a college at the university, became a widower, she herself asked him to marry once more. When he did so she obtained a position as a governess. Amita actually fell in love with Labanya and wished to marry her, but Labanya told him that she had not the qualities which he demanded of his future wife. She was convinced that he did not love her, but a woman of his imagination. She had to admit, however, that she felt strongly drawn to Amita. The lovers agreed to go to Calcutta to celebrate their 'marriage' there, but were prevented by a telegram from Amita's sister Sisi, who announced that she was coming to Shillong with her friend Naten and his sister Ketu, who previously had thought of marrying Amita. The two girls, noticing Amita's internal conflict, suspected Labanya of wanting to marry Amita for his money. Labanya received a letter

from a former admirer, who was unable to forget her. She took counsel with her heart and begged Amita to give up the idea of marriage with her, then left without leaving word as to her destination. This concludes the author's analytical work. Merely by way of an epilogue it is stated that Amita and Labanya parted so that each might return to a previous love.

One of the best things in this novel is Tagore's analysis of the feelings of immature characters, a piece of almost Freudian psycho-analysis. In this novel, even more than in the earlier drama *Grihaprabeś*, the female character is no longer passive, but a self-confident being who shapes her own destiny, and if she gives in, it is of her own free will. The reader is constantly kept interested and expectant. There are passages full of dramatic action, witty and sparkling dialogue. The discussions, although they apparently impede the course of the action, give the reader finely etched portraits of the characters of the novel. The language is polished, and the narrative technique very different from that of Bankimchandra's early work. To illustrate this it will be sufficient to quote two extracts:

"Labanya sat with downcast eyes, without answering. Amita said. 'Your silence is a rejection of all my words without any compensation.'

Labanya, her eyes still downcast, said. 'Dear friend, I am afraid when I hear your words.'

'Afraid of what?'

'I do not know what you expect from me and what I myself can give you.'

Restlessness

'The value of what you can give me lies in the fact that you can give without thinking that it is a gift.'

'When you said that my employer agreed, I suddenly felt uneasy. It seemed to me as if the day of my imprisonment had come.'

'You must be imprisoned.'

'Friend, your taste and education are far superior to mine. If I go on a journey with you, I shall tarry far behind you and you will not call back to me. When that happens I shall not reproach you—no, no, do not try to interrupt, listen first to what I have to say. Please do not try to marry me. If you try to untangle the knot after we are married, it will only become more entangled. What you have already given me is enough. It will last me all my life. But you should not deceive yourself.'

'Darling, why spoil the radiance of to-day by the mourning of to-morrow?'

This is part of Amita's conversation with the mother of Labanya's young charges

"This objection I must answer in the words of a poet. What I tell you in prose must be explained in poetry. Matthew Arnold called poetry 'a criticism of life', I correct him and maintain that poetry is a rhymed commentary on life. I wish to point out to my guest in advance, however, that my words are by no king amongst poets

'What you desire with all your heart,
Do not desire with empty hands;
Do not come to the door with eyes full of tears.'

Restlessness

Please do not forget that love is fullness, and that what we expect of it is not the plea of a beggar. When God loves one of his worshippers he asks at his door for alms.

‘Since you bring a string of pearls,
Take in exchange a marriage wreath.
Will you spread a rug for your goddess
In the dust of the public way?’

This is why I asked the goddess to enter the house with care. What am I to spread out, if I have nothing to spread out? These damp newspapers! To-day of all days the sight of printer’s ink frightens me most. A poet has said ‘I invite a man worthy of invitation when the cup of life is full to the brim I do not invite him to share in my thirst.’ ”

Some admirers of Tagore’s poetry asked the poet to make a selection of his love-poems and write a few new poems to add to it. Tagore approved of the idea, but, as he himself humorously explained in his preface, he was like a machine once wound up it runs on automatically without stopping. This was the origin of the considerable collection published under the title *Mahuyā*, after the flower of the same name, which has an unusually strong and heady odour. Some of these poems have indeed the strength and headiness of his confident savouring of his own manhood. Others are reminiscent of his old love, Shelley. The changed spirit of the later poems included in this collection recalls to the reader the metaphor used by the poet himself in one of his short stories: man is not like a stone, which, when split in

two, can be exactly and firmly joined together again. More than a quarter of a century separates the poet of *Mahuyā* from the author of the ardent and sensuous love-poems such as *Kari o komal*, *Mānasī* and *Chitrā*. The latter work is more under the influence of intellect, full of spirituality and restrained by mental balance, which usually accompanies advanced age.

In the poem *Undaunted*, a man assures his newly wedded wife that their life together will be no game, no heaven on earth, no song of sweet rapture, that they will tread a difficult path of severe toil. They will, however, beg no favour of fate; if sufferings come, let them come, they will go proudly on seeing their world in each other's eyes and praising the sweet message of community. The lover's words to his beloved in *The Pair* are tinged with mysticism. "My eye has set out to search for the buds of secret thoughts in the deep shadow of your eye, but loses its way suddenly in inaccessible secrets and in profound enchantment. Confused, it searches the solitude, but does not find the secret message, it wanders in the unknown, fails to understand and sheds tears." In the poem *Strength* a woman, conscious of her worth, asks why she should stand with head bent by the way, waiting for the fulfilment of her destiny, and staring into space, why she herself cannot hold the reins and guide her life according to her own will. In another poem a woman assures her husband that she brings him a bountiful offering in the shape of her body, which is full of music and the rhythmical vibration of early Spring. In *By the Road* we find the typical humility of the Indian woman: "You walk along the shore on your way to the distant

Restlessness

temple; I am a tree, kissing the earth at your feet with my shadow. O pilgrim, maybe I have a modest share in your worship. I shall stand in your path and witness your pilgrimage. Your worship in the temple contains something of the perfume of my blossoms." Through his God the poet feels again and again the mystery of creation and the pride of eternal life. At the end of the day (see the poem of the same name) he returns to God everything that his heart can give.

In a series of poems he describes several types of woman and gives them appropriate names: one is like a rivulet flowing through the countryside, murmuring softly, without a wave or a whirl on its surface; another is like honey, that knows not its value, for the bee does not betray it, a third is the woman who fills her day with humble duties, without claiming a reward, and hangs a little lamp outside her hut in the evening. The best name for such a woman, he says, is *Śyamalī* ("The Gentle One").

In February 1929 Tagore departed for Malaya, China and Japan. He visited Canada, where he was invited to take part in a session of the National Council of Education. Everywhere he was welcomed with enthusiasm. On his return journey he visited Indo-China.

In this period of unrest he rewrote his early plays, but did not lightly accept his early solutions of their problems. He was dissatisfied with his solution of the theme of the drama *Rājā o rānī* (see page 74), for, as he indicates in the preface, the dispute between Queen Sumitra and King Bikramdeb might have been solved by the victory of Sumitra's great love and not by that of brute force.

In addition, the love of the charming and faithful Ila

for Prince Kumarsen, he says, overburdens the play, the tragedy of Kumarsen's life alone would provide a sufficient theme for a new play. From the angle of humanity it is insufficiently clear why Sumitra so desires the death of her brother. The poet felt these shortcomings and rewrote the play, giving his second version the title of *Tapatī*. In the new version Sumitra no longer comes to the king, announcing the death of her brother, nor does she die herself, and although the conflict of the two forces is solved in such a way that virtue brings much suffering to those who are true to it their whole life long, nevertheless the solution of the new play indicates the victory of the established moral code. In the historical drama *Paritrān* ("Liberation") he returns once more to the theme treated in the novel *Baṭhākuraṇīr hāt* and in the play *Prāyaścitta* (see p. 153). He emphasizes the purifying function of suffering, but the solution remains the same: in both versions Bibha and her brother Udayaditya withdraw to Benares.

The novel *Jogājog* ("Cross Currents"), which is given a wide canvas, deals with the events of everyday life and is without momentous happenings, it contains excellent character-analysis. The novel was written in 1927 and 1928, but was not published until the year 1929. The tale, with the author spins out to great length with the gusto of a born storyteller, deals with the life of two proud families. In spite of the epical dimensions of the story, the author shows masterly art in avoiding tediousness and triviality. The novel is further of interest to the student of folklore, as it describes family customs. The main theme of the novel is the loves, planned and finally

consummated wedding and unhappy married life of the affectionate Kumudini and the rich, but hard-hearted Madhusudan. All this is drawn against the background of an extensive family chronicle, written by the deliberate hand of a tolerant chronicler.

In 1928 Tagore had received a flattering invitation to speak at Oxford for the "Hibbert Lectures." But uncertain health compelled him to ask for a postponement of his lectures. They were not held until 1930. In 1931 they were reprinted under the title *The Religion of Man*.^{*} This work consists of fourteen lectures, which betray the mind of a balanced and genuinely religious man. Their subject is "the humanity of our God" or in other words, but to the same effect "the divinity of Eternal Man," and they are the religious harvest of his maturity. He does not speak, however, as a theological thinker or as a strict philosopher, but as a man recounting his religious experience, compressing the wisdom of a lifetime into a few words. The great charm of the book lies in the fact that in his reflections he is at once thinker and poet. Although Tagore was brought up in an environment which professed monotheistic opinions, his father never compelled him to adapt himself to this environment, neither did he feel the urge to do so. But one day, he says, he became convinced that something within him was striving to manifest itself through his intermediary.

"On that morning in the village the facts of my life suddenly appeared to me in a luminous unity of truth.

* London. George Allen & Unwin Ltd

I felt sure that some Being who comprehended me and my world was seeking his best expression in all my experiences. To this Being I was responsible; for the creation in me is his as well as mine. I felt that I had found my religion at last, the Religion of Man, in which the infinite became defined in humanity and came close to me so as to need my love and co-operation."

This conception of a sort of Socratic *daimonion* has its place in his poems, first in *Sonār tarī*, later, to an increased extent, in *Gītāñjali*, where he calls this being *jībandebatā* or divinity of life. His religion, which is therefore founded on spiritual experience and revelation, is a sort of higher subjectivism, and has much in common with Bergson's *élan vital* and American pragmatism, more particularly William James's moralism. He believes in the development of human personality, in the idea of the spiritual superman, and in the irrevocable advent of the Kingdom of God on earth, if, as he asks, every individual man thinks clearly, feels nobly and acts honestly. He does not imagine God as a being enthroned in heaven, but as a Spirit which is concealed on earth, in us, in everything. Here he differs from both his father and Rammohan Ray, who believed in a personal God. It is interesting to note how persistently Tagore seeks a word for this conception of his God. He is almost unwilling to use the word "God," preferring such words as "the Divinity of Man," "Eternal Spirit," "Man the Eternal," "Universal Spirit," "Spirit of Man," "Spirit of Love," "Universal Self," "Supreme Person," "Super-Soul," "Spirit of Life," "World-spirit of Man." If man worships this divinity in himself he will not pursue the

Restlessness

mere material improvement of his position, but will celebrate spiritual holidays by the pursuit of beauty in picture galleries, listening to beautiful plays, examining beautiful architecture, reading good books, or even meditating on the purpose of this life.

Tagore's booklet *Man*, published in 1937, is, ideologically speaking, a sequel to this work. It contains three lectures delivered by Tagore at the Andhra University. If the *Religion of Man* recounts Tagore's religious experiences, the treatises in *Man* are the poet's message to man, for mankind. In them a poet of mature judgment analyses the essence of man's mission and the significance of human life.

From England Tagore went to Germany, Denmark, Russia and the United States of America. His letters from Russia (*Rāśīyār chithi*), which were translated into English in 1931, show that he observed Russia with a prudent eye, here admiring, there cautioning. When he came to say good-bye to his hosts he said. "I wish to let you know how deeply I have been impressed by the amazing intensity of your energy in spreading education among the masses. I appreciate it all the more keenly because I belong to that country where millions of my fellow-countrymen are denied the light that education can bring them. You have recognized the truth that in extirpating all social evils one has to go to the root, which can only be done through education . . . I must ask you. Are you doing your ideal a service by arousing in the minds of ~~those~~ under your training anger, class hatred and revengefulness against those not sharing your views? You are working in a great cause. Therefore you

must be great in your minds, great in your mercy, your understanding and your patience" Tagore praises the Russian Government's desire to bring enlightenment to broad masses of the people and notes with pleasure that in a short time its work has been granted a considerable measure of success. For he is convinced that man's final aim is spiritual enlightenment. A genuinely enlightened mind will surmount all differences of class and caste. The new Russia appeals to him as an Indian, in whose country the caste system is so highly developed, by its abolition of all differences of race.

His views on the distribution of property are interesting. Capitalism, he says, has certainly damaged the interest of broad masses of the population, but abolition of private property will not do away with misery. Class war, too, will not help to achieve the necessary harmony. Mankind must be humanized, and this will never be achieved by bloodshed and revolution. But the labouring classes must be able not only to live, but also to grow. The State itself cannot reform society, but on the other hand society may act as a corrective for the blunders of the State (this opinion betrays the influence of political circumstances in his country). He believes in a sort of Platonic ideal of government by an intellectual aristocracy, in the government of individuals who would be guided in the performance of their mission by the spirit of universal justice.

One of the greatest gifts with which he was endowed is the power to interpret nature. *Banabānī* ("Forest Message") is such an interpretation. It contains poems

written on his memories of trees, bushes and flowers, poems written for various occasions, on the seasons of the year and the creative power of nature. He admits in the preface that often, when he is abroad, he is charmed by the memory of Indian trees, the instruments of eternal music, whose message has a profound influence on the human mind. One of the first poems is dedicated to Jagadīschandra Bose, the well-known plant physiologist (died 1937), who found that plants have the same life-element as man. In some cases the poet prefaces the poems by a short introduction explaining their genesis. Nandalal Bose, for example, a painter and teacher at Santiniketan, sent him from Kurseong a postcard on which he had drawn a deodar standing alone on a hill. Tagore answered him in a poem *The Deodar*. In the slender deodar, growing on the silent slopes of the Himalayas, as if absorbed in meditation, he sees the visible expression of this meditation, the earth speaks in the rustling of the deodar, and the sun mingles the music of its light in its voice. In another poem Tagore recalls his journey with his father to the Himalayas, the whisper of whose woods reaches beyond the clouds. . . In Santiniketan there is a grove of different trees, which were planted there, when Debendranath took a liking to the place, at the side of the mountain giants in whose shadow the saintly man used to meditate. Among these trees there is a solitary coconut palm, of a kind which thrives on the seashore, by some wonder it grew in Santiniketan to a height exceeding that of the other trees. The poet fancies that it grew so high in order to be able to see as far as its home shores

Chapter Seven

THE AUTUMN OF LIFE

TURBULENT youth passed, creative maturity passed, and the number of the poet's years inexorably witnessed the autumn of his life. On May 6, 1931, Tagore reached the age of seventy.

The life work of the seventy-year-old poet, prose writer, sage, pedagogue, and temple builder of divine humanity was blessed by the Great Giver. This prophet of the idea of redemption, who made such great demands upon himself, was far more lenient to others. His life has been one continuous growth, although the hour of evening has already struck for him, he is still enriching the world with melody and his hand is still untiring—the harvest of each succeeding year adds to the wealth already accumulated.

We may fitly apply to him Wordsworth's description of *The Happy Warrior*,

“the man . . . who, lifted high,
Conspicuous object in a nation's eye . . .
Plays, in the many games of life, that one
Where what he most doth value must be won.”

His seventieth birthday was worthily celebrated. His friends dedicated to him *The Golden Book of Tagore*

The Autumn of Life

which contained contributions by the poets and authors, artists and scientists, politicians and statesmen of thirty countries. This voluminous book shows at the same time the vast number of his admirers, who are attracted not only by his greatness, but also by the charm of his disposition. He is as pure as broad daylight and places truth above all things.

The period of his well-merited jubilee, however, did not find Tagore living in contented inactivity and relying upon the achievements of the productive years of his past life, he worked on in disciplined mental balance and his capacity for work is still enviable.

A new collection of poems published in 1932, entitled *Parishesh* ("The End"), shows perhaps more clearly than any other of his works that Tagore was never the interpreter of searing pain, toil or crude sentiment, but the poet of nobler feelings. With this work he seems to bid farewell to his poetical activities, with a tinge of melancholy. In *Birthday* he realizes that the untiring recurrence of his birthday will soon cease. He is reaching the last bead of the rosary of his sunny days. He wishes to celebrate this day in the temple courts of the world as the festival of his retirement from worldly activities, to bury deep in his heart the feeling of his existence in this world, to drink for the last time from the lake of the pleasures of this world, and to fall asleep on the last evening of his life on the shore of the ocean of peace. The atmosphere of a number of other poems is similar, whether he converses with his other self in the poem *Thou*, or, sitting at a window, looking at the country scene, talks with the trees, assuring them that, just as

The Autumn of Life

they have the trembling of their leaves, so in him the emotions of the earth express themselves through his thoughts, which concentrate in the single message that he has lived in the heart of the universe, at unity with the spirit of the world ("I am"). In the poem *Liberation* he apostrophizes his divinity, asking that it, the ever beautiful, should give him courage, give him strength and free him from the pain of falling asleep in the dust of everyday life, and that all his thoughts and all his words might be brought into harmony with the rhythm of peace, completely free of all doubts. In addition to these poems the book contains a number dedicated to Indian patriots in prison, whom he praises for their self-sacrifice, and others dedicated to the schoolgirls of Śantiniketan. Other poems, again, contain his reflections on passing events; thus the poems *Borobudur* and *Siyām* refer to his journey in 1927.

The collection *Punaścha* ("And Again") is in a lighter vein. When, in *Lipikā*, he first started writing prose poems, he did not venture, he says, to divide up his paragraphs into lines of various length like lines of verse, but retained the appearance of prose. There is no doubt, however, that poetical prose must be disciplined in the same way as a poem. Tagore thinks that this is the reason why his cousin Abanindranath Tagore was unsuccessful with his poetical prose, for his language was not disciplined. It is not sufficient, he said, to loosen the bonds imposed by the metrical ornamentation of verse, it is necessary to remove as well the adornments of poetic diction. In his new attempt he wished to avoid the use of words commonly used only in poetry, such as *tare*

(for), *sane* (with) or *mor* (my). He touched on this question in the preface and also in the poem *The Play*. He once wrote a play, he said, in which Urbaśi gives Arjuna a wreath, but Arjuna refuses to accept the wreath, saying that by right she should put it only round the neck of a god. Urbaśi objects that in heaven there is no need for wreaths, that a wreath has no value for heaven, and this is the reason why she comes to earth, for only the earth appreciates her act. The poet considered this thought a good one. But the question is now, how he knows that it is good. What is good for one moment need not be good for another. The same applies to the new style of poetry. He, too, was advised by his friends to write poems in verse. But he is of the opinion that, if verse has the regularity of the waves of the sea, prose has the power of strength and freedom. In other respects these poetical sketches have the same themes as *Līpikā*. Memories of a river, a tree, a piece of ground, a man flash through his mind. A concise description, drawn in a few almost grudging strokes, provides the foundation for his reflections. Thus in *Earthy Soil* he recalls the ground around Śāntiniketan. To the west there is a wood, then ploughed fields, the Santal village, on one side of which runs a winding, shadeless path, an isolated group of palms. To the north the green mantle of the earth disappears, the earthy soil is seen in its nakedness, undulating in toy-like hillocks. Here the poet came in his early youth and here he wrote tales as though he was playing with pebbles. Many days passed. Close to the valleys of this district he built his school, amidst the trees. Many of those who joined him in his arms departed,

The Autumn of Life

some remained. What will happen when his working days are over? Whatever happens, it is certain that to the north the red earthy soil, its heart laid bare, will remain, to the south will be the same rice fields, men will still go to market, and in the west, on the horizon, there will still be a dark blue line. In the idyllic picture *The Flute* he describes how the sound of a flute from the house of a rich neighbour makes a poor clerk, whose head is full of worries about his next meal, forget his troubles, and describes the castles in the air which he builds in his ecstasy. With great verbal economy, but unusually vividly, he paints the portrait of a man going to town

“An oldish upcountry man
 tall and lean,
 With shaven shrunken cheeks like wilted fruits,
 Jogging along the road to the market town
 In his patched-up pair of countrymade shoes
 And a short tunic made of printed chintz,
 A frayed umbrella tilted over his head,
 A bamboo stick under his armpit.

It is a sultry morning of August,
The light is vaguely filtering through
Thin white clouds
The last night seemed smothered
Under a damp black blanket,
And to-day a sluggish wind
Is fitfully stirring a dubious response
Among *āmlaki* leaves.

The Autumn of Life

The stranger passed by the hazy skyline of my mind,
a mere person,
With no definition, no care that may trouble him,
No needs for any the least thing
And I appeared to him for a moment
At the farthest limit of the unclaimed land of his life,
In the grey mist that separates one
From all relations.

I imagine he has his cow in his stall,
A parrot in the cage,
His wife with brass bangles round her arms
Grinding wheat,
The washerman for his neighbour,
The grocer's shop across the lane,
A harassing debt to the man from Peshawar,
And somewhere my own indistinct self
Only as a passing person "

(Translated by the poet himself,
Modern Review, 1936, p. 365.)

In the poem entitled *Death* he puts his reflections on death into the following words

"In my thoughts I imagine what death will be like
I think of that last day, when the instant of ending
approaches.
Everything in time and space,
All objects, life, all wishes and all actions,
All the encounters of hope and despair
In every country, in each house and in each heart,

The Autumn of Life

All movement and all circulation
In the infinite ocean of deathless life,
Forces unbounded and unrecognized
Whirling on and on, layer upon layer,
Of all planets and all stars,
On the fine, wavering brink of unconsciousness
These are the last things of this life to me
One foot is still this side the boundary,
The other is already o'er the brink,
Where the unknown future waits for me
With an endless rosary of days and nights
Woven of light and darkness.
The infinite's countless attributes,
Woven into single lives,
Stretch from the past to the future
In the midst of the heart of the universe
I have suddenly ceased to be
Can it be true ?
Can this malevolent lifelessness
Have found a hole somewhere ?
Would not the barge of eternity
Have sunk through that hole that day
If death were emptiness
And harsh denial of great unity ?”

In May 1931 Lord Willingdon assumed office as Viceroy of India. In addition to the dissatisfaction in Bengal he encountered two other sources of unrest: a number of the Indian princes were dissatisfied with the suggested organization of India as a Federal State, fearing that in the new scheme of things they would be allotted

The Autumn of Life

a merely subordinate rôle, and some of the Indian Nationalists were clearly dissatisfied with Gandhi's policy. The representatives of the "Indian National Congress" wished to have the guarantee that, if Gandhi took part in the reopened conferences in London in the Autumn of 1931, which were destined, in agreement with the representatives of India, to put the finishing touches to the proposed plan for a federated India, he would have complete liberty of speech. At these conferences Gandhi stated in the name of the Indian Nationalists that India does not refuse to ally itself with Britain, and that he himself firmly trusts that an honourable co-operation between India and Great Britain may be realized, and that the Indians will once more proudly call themselves members of the Empire, if the relation between India and Great Britain is one founded on the equality of the two parties. India, he said, has all its rights as the gift of God, no nation can rob it of them without committing a terrible crime against God and humanity.

The negotiations in London were unsuccessful, but while they were in progress anarchists provoked disorders in some parts of India, and the peasants revolted under the burden of the high land taxes. Congress did not agree with the heavy burden placed on the smallholder and recommended the peasants not to pay the high taxes, thus arrogating rights which had not been vested in it. The Viceroy hoped that Gandhi would collaborate with him to solve the problem on his return. But Gandhi could make no decisions against the will of the leaders of Congress. So the Viceroy started to put down the unrest by severe measures. Freedom of speech and of the

The Autumn of Life

Press was abolished. Arrests were made. The leader of Congress, Vallabhai Patel, and Gandhi, were arrested at the beginning of January. All political activities were stifled. Into this oppressive atmosphere came an open letter from Tagore to *The Times*, written in May 1932. In this letter he calls for the inauguration of a new era of faith and conciliation, for friendly understanding between race and race, between nation and nation, estranged by the necessities of politics and diplomacy. He states that India is prepared for such a change in its affairs, which would make its relations with Britain harmonious and give birth to understanding on both sides. India, he says, is waiting only for signs of goodwill on both sides, for immediate and sincere signs, signs of a noble faith in mankind, which will create the moral community of the future, for signs of constructive deeds for the public weal and peaceful harmony between the nations of India and between India and Britain. Tagore appeals in his letter to all those who have the welfare of mankind at heart to come forward in this critical hour and boldly to take upon themselves the task of fulfilling their moral responsibilities, of building up on the foundation of faith and of accepting the truth in a spirit of generous forgiveness on both sides. Memories of the past, however painful, should never obscure our view of the happier future which it is our task to construct.

This open letter met with no understanding either in Britain or in India. The mere fact that this letter was not given a prominent place in the newspaper in question is typical of its reception. In India, many politicians did not agree with Tagore's gesture of goodwill. One of these

The Autumn of Life

was Gandhi, who was of the opinion that Tagore's letter shows a lack of national pride.

In May 1932 Tagore visited Iran in response to an earlier invitation. He was welcomed with princely honours. The towns he visited competed with each other in showing him their esteem. He dwelt in palaces, and the celebrations in his honour were impressive.

The poet gradually arrived at the bitter conclusion that the East understood him better than the West.

In *Kāler jātrā* ("The March of the Ages"), a two-act sketch, he returns to the old problem of the Indian caste system. The first part, entitled *Rather raśi* ("The Waggon Rope"), is a rhymed satire, the scene of which is placed during the Waggon Festival, in which a large waggon bearing the god is drawn by a crowd of fervent worshippers. This time the waggon refuses to move, although all classes of the population, even the priests and the king, haul on the rope. But the waggon becomes light as soon as the *śūdras*, the outcastes of Indian society, take hold of the rope. The second part, *Kabir dīkshā* ("The Consecration of the Poet"), is a dialogue in which the poet proclaims that humanity's highest asset is man's creative spirit and generosity.

Taser deś ("A Land of Cards") is a satire written in 1932, but not published until 1933, this time the poet's butt is misplaced conservatism, conventionality, inactivity and retrogressiveness.

A prince and a grocer arrive in the course of their travels at a strange country of card-people, who shut themselves off from all influence coming from other parts and themselves are intolerantly orthodox, love

The Autumn of Life

leisure and dislike being disturbed out of their lethargy. They are naturally annoyed at the advent of the foreigners, who disturb their calm, and ask the king to throw them into prison or banish them from the country. But the prince's message appeals to the women, thus bringing about a change in the attitude of the men as well. The scene of the satire is obviously India, orthodox India, which resists the unceasing onset of the influences involved by the presence of British merchants and the British Government ("the grocer and the prince")

At this time relations between Tagore and Gandhi became warmer. Desiring to compel the higher castes to come to an agreement with the outcastes, Gandhi started fasting on September 20, 1932. The fast lasted a week, fearing for the health of their beloved leader, the representatives of the two parties really did come to an agreement, much to the joy of patriotic Indians. Rabin-dranath was one of those who congratulated Gandhi. Gandhi wrote to Andrews in November 1932 that his fast brought him many treasures of which he had not dreamed; *gurudeb* (the divine poet) was, he said, the most valuable of these. He had always greatly desired to find a corner in his heart and now, God be praised, he had found it.

In 1933 Tagore published *Dui bon* ("The Two Sisters"), a delicate novel in which he reverts once more to the problems of a woman's heart and the unfathomable depths of her feelings, particularly when she finds an escape from some complicated situation at the cost of her own pain.

Śaśanka was an engineer in Government service. Since

The Autumn of Life

he was overlooked when the time for promotion had come, his wife, Śarmilā, advised him to become a partner in an undertaking belonging to her cousin, and gave him the necessary capital out of her private fortune. The undertaking prospered, but Śaśanka, who was now very busy, neglected his wife. Her younger sister Urmimālā (called Urmī), a lovely and beautiful girl, took a liking for the profession of medicine and desired to take over the management of a sanatorium which her father Rajaram intended to build in memory of his prematurely deceased son. When, however, Śarmilā fell ill and her sister Urmī nursed her, Śaśanka became closely attached to Urmī, who in her turn fell in love with him. Śarmilā stifled the pain in her heart and suggested that Śaśanka should marry her younger sister as well and that they should leave Calcutta. In the meantime, however, Śaśanka had lost a considerable proportion of his fortune, having neglected his business owing to his preoccupation with personal affairs. The money which his wife had invested in the business was lost. He therefore decided to stay in Calcutta to make the damage good. Urmī left Calcutta for a few days, and soon afterwards two letters came from her. To Śaśanka she wrote that she was going to Europe in order to study, Śarmilā she begged to forgive her for breaking up her marriage.

In none of Tagore's other novels is the contrast between the male and female characters so sharp as in *The Two Sisters*. One of the characters in this book is Nirad, the young doctor, a friend of the two sisters' dead brother. Nirad would like to marry Urmī. He is a conceited young man, who after Rajaram's death imposes restric-

The Autumn of Life

tions on Urmī under the pretence of superintending her education. He is described very vividly, as a type which is the natural product of the society of the period. The author's aim was obviously that the reader should judge Śaśanka, with all his failures, by the superficiality of the socially impeccable Nirad. This novel adds to the number of Tagore's penetrating descriptions of the upper classes in Calcutta. As in *Śeṣher kabitā*, his diction is adapted to the *milieu* of the novel. On the one hand it contains a large number of English words, on the other many words suggested by literary associations; both are firmly set in an expressive and characteristic diction with colloquial pronunciation and popular turns of speech.

The novel opens with a description of Śarmilā's character.

"There are two types of woman many wise men have told me this.

The first type is prevalently maternal, the second type are mistresses.

To draw a comparison with the seasons, we may say that the maternal type is the rainy season. It gives moisture, gives fruit, prevents excessive heat, comes down from the heights, alleviates the drought and fills in all gaps.

The second type is the Spring. Deep is its secret, sweet its charm, its insatiable activities excite the blood and stir up the secret chambers of fairy treasures, where some hidden chord of the golden lute stays dumb, waiting for the day when it should be played on, and when its note

The Autumn of Life

resounds, echoes the voice of something indescribable in the heart and every fibre of the body.]

Śarmilā, wife of Śaśanka, was of the maternal type.

Her eyes were large and placid; her look was wise and deep, there was a long vermilion mark in the parting of her hair, her body was youthful, supple and as fresh as a new cloud on the horizon heralding the approach of rain, her *sārī* had a broad black border, on each arm she wore a thick bracelet adorned with the head of a dolphin, she did not use these bracelets as ornaments, but on account of their beauty ”

Before the end of that year Tagore published another collection of old and new poems which are accompanied and aptly complemented by illustrations, it is therefore called *Bichitrītā* (“Picture-book”) The poems have now the calm of advanced age. They are distinguished by wisdom rather than by enthusiasm, permeated by poetical imagination and enriched by the excellence of his literary style In the poem *Blossom* a blossom waits in the shadow of the leaves for the woman to whom its petals, awakened by her touch, would whisper that their life vibrates to the same music, that in both of them dwells the same beauty, although their paths have not been the same, for the blossom is near its beginning, whereas the woman has already received the message of her final destiny. Some of the sketches are lightly drawn and are intended to emphasize a contrast, such as that between the description of a quiet country scene and the murmuring flow of the river, and on the other hand the picturesque turmoil of life.

The poem *Alone* describes a maiden who carefully puts on her festive robe, puts on all her bracelets and embellishes herself to welcome her lover.

In the poem *Revealed* a young woman sees how insignificant she is to-day, on the day of her wedding, she is half her husband, who will carry her with pride to his house. She will lose herself in the victorious dignity of service, clinging to her husband like a creeper to a tree, which suddenly notices with astonishment that it is quite surrounded by the blossoms of the creeper.

The book does not lack humour, in the poem *The Defeat* a maiden replies to the ardent declaration of her lover by saying that the football team she supports has lost a match.

A number of other poems are ardent hymns to nature.

Some of the drawings of *Bichitritā* are the work of the poet himself. In all Tagore's work we meet the same great love of expressiveness and a profound understanding of colour. Like Leonardo da Vinci, Tagore considers painters sons of God. He says that the universe, in addition to the language of sound, has also the language of line. Every object in this world, he says, proclaims by the dumb tokens of line and colour that it is not a mere abstraction, but really does exist. With line and colour the artist creates the language of undoubted fact. Tagore, too, tried to express in line and colour what his otherwise ample vocabulary was unable to reproduce. The whole gambit of the emotions can be expressed in outlines, movement, line and colour. His drawings, particularly his single figures, have in spite of their apparent simplicity a strange note of beauty, and appear

The Autumn of Life

to be in some mysterious way related to the words of the poems. When they were exhibited in Moscow, he was asked what his drawings mean. He was silent, he said, just as his drawings were silent, but they should have been their own explanation.

Rabindranath Tagore has served the cause of Indian painting in other ways as well. He founded an arts and crafts section (*kalābhaban*) at Śāntiniketan, where Nandalal Bose, a pupil of Abanindranath Tagore, founder of the Bengal School of Painting in Calcutta, works. Abanindranath Tagore was at first under European influence, later, by the persuasion of E B Havell, he was induced to turn his attention to the period of the Mogul rulers, but still betrayed the influence of foreign masters. This was of great importance for Bengal, particularly at the beginning of the twentieth century, when as a result of the patriotic enthusiasm everything Indian was considered to be best, which, however, threatened to have an evil effect on the intellectual level of the country. Nandalal Bose walks in the steps of his teacher, studies and tries to find a place for the art of painting in the life of the Indians, by way of the Rajput, Mogul and Ajanta styles he endeavours to find the original Indian art.

In August 1934 Professor Gilbert Murray wrote an open letter to Tagore asking for his collaboration in founding a society of thinkers and authors to work for the salvation of our civilization and clarification of international misunderstandings. Before the end of September Tagore had written him a long reply. Both letters were published in the "International Series of Open Letters"

The Autumn of Life

under the title *East and West*.^{*} In his answer Tagore discusses the two civilizations and emphasizes that there is a difference between West and East. The West admires a man's power, the East respects his divinity. If he himself sometimes condemns some machine, he does not condemn the science which invented the machine, but only the West's misuse of the machine. Man should not allow the machine to mechanize his life, but should try to make it serve his interests. Tagore reproaches Europe with being unscrupulous towards the East in politics and trade. The only clear sign of a link between Europe and Asia to-day, he said, is Europe's exploitation of Asia, which in the past was attracted by Europe and placed its hopes in it, expecting it to preach liberty to the world. But instead Europe built warehouses and barracks in Asia and Africa and neglected mere human relations. In the letter Tagore also discussed some of India's problems; if Europe finds understanding for them, he said, a closer contact will be easier. He said that religion in its present form has not fulfilled its high mission either in the West or in the East, and that the growing nationalism of our great epoch has still further increased the outward contrast. Europe spreads the tentacles of its trade far and wide, and its lust to exploit natural wealth all over the world stirs up violent feelings and facilitates selfish exploitation. Nevertheless, however, it may be said that the day of mutual understanding has already dawned.

Tagore's love of trees, flowers, parks and woods, which will be well known to the reader of *Banabānī*, is voiced once more in an article entitled "Love of Trees

^{*} London George Allen & Unwin Ltd

and Flowers," published in the periodical *Prabāsi* in 1928. He holds converse with the trees, as in *Lipikā*, in the fine prose-poem *The Breath and Spirit of Life*. In trees he greets friends of mankind, who whisper of the life of the ages and the sap of centuries and bring a blessing to men. He returns to this love in the novel *Mālāñcha* ("The Flower-garden"), written in 1934, in which he praises the charm of gardens and the cultivation of trees. Tagore is convinced that neither political activities on the Western pattern nor the accumulation of wealth brings peace of mind. He advises his readers to forget the battle of life and the turmoil of political elections, to avoid the smoke of factory chimneys and to revert to country life and the rustic calm of parks.

Niraja, wife of Aditya, was happily married for ten years. She fell ill, however, and started worrying about her husband's love, particularly when Sarala, Aditya's cousin, joined the household to help him in his gardening. In her jealousy she asked her husband to compel Sarala to leave. Aditya realized that it was only by the help of Sarala's uncle that he had made his fortune, and wished to give her part of his property to enable her to live in comfort. Sarala, however, feeling herself a thorn in Niraja's side, and loving Ramen, a worker in the nationalist movement, determined to help him struggle for his ideals and even to go to prison for their sake. Niraja regretted her jealousy and said that she would like to welcome Sarala in her house once more. But when Sarala was suddenly released and came back, she felt the pain of her old sorrow deep in her heart and realized that in reality she had not wished for Sarala's return; the

The Autumn of Life

burden of her sorrow finally killed her. This, however, did not solve the conflict.

The author traces the pain and divagations of Niraja's sentimental heart in the midst of the monotonous life of a middle-class family. The joys and sufferings of this novel, however, are without depth, and there is no violent emotion.

The same year he published *Bāmsārī*, a conversational drama dealing with high Calcutta society. It describes the mental struggles of the heroine of the novel, *Bāmsārī*, a modern girl with an English education, and *Somsaṅkar*, the ruler of a Native State, a man of modern ideas, who is fated to marry the charming and gentle *Sushama*, who in turn has to suppress her affection for *Purandar*, an educated man of ascetic inclinations.

The inflammable *Bāmsārī* with the mysterious emotions, which lead her to a flirtation with *Kshitiś*, a young author, and finally induce her to make him marry her, is a new type of Bengali girl. The author's aim was evidently to show once more that a modern education not based on indigenous tradition cannot properly mature. None of Tagore's women gives volcanic vent to her sentiments and passions. It would be wrong to accuse the author of not going deep enough in his descriptions. The Indian woman is educated to suppress the ebullition of her feelings, however violent.

Tagore was almost seventy-five when he was suddenly seized by a longing to return once more to the period of political agitation after the partition of Bengal. The result was the novel *Chār adhyāy* ("Four Chapters"). One of those who at that time placed themselves entirely in

The Autumn of Life

the service of the nationalist struggle was Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya, an old friend of Tagore's, his first helper after the foundation of Śantiniketan school in 1901. During the boycott of foreign goods, however, Upadhyaya left his young pupils to their forms and joined the young generation in its struggle for the nationalist cause. When, in consequence of his disapproval of its methods, Tagore became estranged from the movement, he lost touch with Brahmabandhab, who later came to visit him, however, at Jodasanko palace. The two fellow-combatants exchanged memories of the struggle, and when Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya left he said "Rabibabu, I have fallen low." He left without waiting for Tagore's reply.

The theme of *Four Chapters* is the fate of a revolutionary society, the moving spirit of which is Indranath. Under this name Tagore describes the Werther-like character of Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya. The members of the society are suspected, persecuted and arrested by the police. Ananda, one of the revolutionaries, loves Ela, another member of the conspiracy. They prefer to sacrifice their love on the altar of their patriotism rather than to betray the sacred cause of their nation. From heated debates the reader receives a vivid impression of the fervour of patriotic enthusiasm felt by the young Bengali generation and of their passion for discussion. Tagore's treatment of this theme shows not only his condemnation of intense anger and a patriotism which is not accompanied by deeds and leads only to negation, but also his profound comprehension of the social problems of to-day. This book, like all his other novels,

The Autumn of Life

reveals a spirit of introspection and a longing for perfection.

Śeshsaptak ("The Last Seven") is a collection of prose poems similar to *Punaścha* or the earlier *Lipikā*, of which some of the themes are reminiscent. Stylistically, Tagore continued to attach importance to the melodiousness of his language and to the simple but artistic construction of his sentences. The themes are mostly of a retrospective nature, but without any of the oppressive melancholy of age. Memories of a forgotten or a fleeting impression or of a smile call up a train of thought which the poet develops and embroiders. Thinking of the fertile years of collaboration with Pramathanath Chaudhuri he realizes that at this time he was borne by a mighty force, stronger even than during his early youth. "A vivid image of the flush of youth arose before my eyes. Not even in the prime of my youth had the message of youth guided my pen with such an exuberance of energy. I realized that a man does not attain an advanced age unless he leaves old age behind him." Elsewhere he recalls the difference between the old times, when children like him used to listen to fairy tales and stories told by an old servant, and the new, when a boy gets his stories out of a book read by electric light.

The sixth poem recalls the time "when, at the end of the day, he approached the crossroads of evening." On his way through life he had been busy replenishing depleted stores, but now the goal is near and no more stores are needed. Nevertheless he would like a Spring flower, such as he loved so much, to be laid beside his empty pilgrim's bag for a few days. In the garden of

The Autumn of Life

this world he is waiting for a new morning, when the chain of necessity will be broken. New shores already appear before him beyond the seas. He does not want to weigh down his boat with burdens from this shore. He will go alone, a new man to new shores

Typical of the book is the introductory poem

"I knew that I had reached you
It did not even occur to me
To test the value of your gift
Nor did you even ask me for a price.
Day after day passed, night after night,
You gave me your basket to empty it
I gave it a look,
And absent-mindedly added it to my store,
Next day I no longer remembered about it
The pink blossom of a new Spring
Was added to your gift,
And the full moon at Autumn shone on it

Covering my feet
With the flood of your raven hair you said·
'The royal fee you pay
Is greater far than what I give
More I cannot give,
Having no more to give '
Your eyes shone with tears as you said it.
To-day you are here no longer.
Day after day passes, night after night,
And you do not come.

The Autumn of Life

Long afterwards I opened the doors of my storehouse,
Looked at the treasures you gave me,
And lifted them up to my heart.
And then my proud indifference
Grovelled in the dust of the earth,
Where were your footprints still.
With pain I have paid for your love,
And in losing you first won you fully."

On the brow of the genius calm cannot descend, still less fatigue. His interest in art did not slacken, even when his fine head had become quite white. It still seemed to him that he had not yet said everything he had to say. At the end of the year 1935 he published a voluminous collection of contemplative lyrics, entitled *Bīthikā* ("Avenue"), in which he abandoned the scene of the present with its emotional agitation and "made friends with the past." The very first poem, *The Shadows of the Past*, is a magnificent apostrophe of the past, whose realm constantly increases as day follows day; memories wed forgetfulness there, and on its canvas emerging from the darkness the brush of our memory, dipped in rosy hues, calls up tales of life foredoomed to oblivion. In another poem he says that pondering over our memories has the beneficial effect of eliminating entirely the personal element (*Musings*). And on the other hand happy moments and great loyalties fall into the well of the past and old paths grow mossy, there is no more room in the house of the present for old faces, and if they come in, they come only as strangers (*The Old House*). The woman whom the poet's fancy shapes gives

The Autumn of Life

more than she has received, her picture calls forth rich music from the strings of the poet's lute, so she pays more than she receives (*Repayment*).

It is wrong to shut oneself up alone and surround oneself with a fence of worries. One must allow oneself to be carried away by the current of life, and live (*The Call of Life*). Death should not be feared, for it is the mother of a new life (*Death the Mother*). In another poem the poet reflects over a scene from everyday life: a slim, well-built Santal maiden steps lightly along a path strewn with gravel, a basket full of earth on her head, and passes the poet. She was hired, with others, to carry earth for a house to be built. The poet thinks that the wages paid to her are an insult to all her beauty and her destiny. In the poem *Divinity* he returns to his old idea that God desires to live in man, and that this is the birth of immortality in this mortal world, out of the womb of death. In Indian love poems the rainy period is bound up with the idea of the parting of lovers. *Night of Rain* is quite in this Baishnaba spirit.

“O friend, friend afar, do you know my pain in the depth of the night, while the lightning flashes? Do you know that my heart trembles under the breath of the rain-bearing wind? Will my vigil of longing and pain be in vain?”

O friend, friend afar, do you know that the *mālātī* that you planted by the door of my house has blossomed under the evil touch of the moist wind? Do you know that the lute you played on is lamenting to-day on my lap? Have you forgotten your lute, O friend, friend afar?”

The Autumn of Life

On the day of the celebration of his seventy-fifth birthday, in Śantiniketan, Tagore read extracts from *Patraput* ("A Cup of Leaves"), a book of poems in melodious and rhythmical prose. From the store of his sunny days he has chosen a series of sixteen pictures. His poetic fancy mounts on wings of pure realism to the realm of dreams. It is clear that the title of the work is taken from the thirteenth picture. In this poem the writer compares himself with a tree which is nourished by the light of heaven and the sap drawn from the earth. Its contact with the world takes places through its leaves, which spread the message of his dreams in the whisper of the wind, the time has now come for the leaves to fall, and he asks to whom it leaves them. In the first poem he says that in the profusion of his joys and sorrows he has been given many a happy moment. But often, when he wished to clothe it in words, it seemed to him that the words did not fully express the reality. This was the case when, during a stay in Darjeeling, he went with friends by night to Sinchal. Now he wishes to describe that pleasant trip. Some of the poems describe the beauty of nature, but at the same time its destructive force. The ninth poem of the book is a powerful description of a storm. In poem number two he admits to a love of solitude. Men seeking rest desire a change of surroundings, but he, like the Indian soothsayers of old, finds recreation in the depths of his own self. Full of significance is the only rhymed and rhythmical poem in this book, the last and rather melancholy piece, which is in places reminiscent of Whitman. In one of his letters, written many years before (*Chinnapatra*), he confessed

The Autumn of Life

what a pleasure to him it was to write a single poem, even a short one. In a poem, he said, the feelings of the heart are embodied in so adequate a form that they are almost tangible. His whole vast poetic production proves his need to give vent to his feelings in verse. In the last poem of *Patraput* he wrote that even now, in the evening of his life, he has to beg his muse to leave him in peace. Words "uttered in bright and shadeless light" desire to acquire fullness in the silence of the night and to lose themselves in the infinite sea of unspoken words.

Tagore was destined to receive one more satisfaction, on the very eve of a new political reorganization intended to give the Indian provinces a greater measure of independence. He had always proclaimed the necessity for active collaboration between West and East, all his life long he worked on the development of his mother tongue and did his best to make the language of the people the foundation and pattern of the literary tongue. The conservative advocates of the immutability of the language and fervent imitators of the ancient classics, however, did not agree with his alleged innovations. Yet it was none of these, but Rabindranath Tagore, who was invited by the university in February 1937 to speak at the annual assembly, at which the chancellor of the university makes speeches of political importance (as Lord Curzon did on many occasions during his viceroyship), the vice-chancellor gives a survey of the activities of the university during the preceding year, and some well-known scholar is invited to make a speech. Tagore, in one of his finest speeches, discussed Western influence

The Autumn of Life

and the tasks confronting his mother tongue. It was the first time in the history of Calcutta University that this speech was read in Bengali and not in English. Tagore expressed his regret that the language of instruction at the Indian universities had up till then been English and not the students' mother tongue, although he publicly admitted that English will always have a place of honour in the Indian universities, partly for practical reasons, partly because it is the medium by which the learning of the West is communicated to India. He did not deny that Western learning had brought India great intellectual treasures and that it had influenced the regeneration of Bengali literature. Had not the first poetic efforts of Michael Madhusudan Datta (born 1824) and the early prose of Bankimchandra Chatterjee (born 1838) been written in English? Both, however, soon realized that it is only through the medium of the language of the country that foreign influence can fertilize its soil, both authors proved by the literary fruit of their maturity that the foreign seed had fallen on an unusually fertile soil. Tagore said he was able to claim that Calcutta University, with the support of Western culture imparted through the medium of English, has not only attained high rank in the field of scientific research, but has also become the guardian of Bengali literature, which has already brought a rich harvest in all its fields. He regretted only that the West, which formerly struggled for progress and the good of mankind, had been false to its mission and lost its faith in truth, humanity's greatest treasure, by means of which it had acquired dominion in the world. To-day, India can repay that debt to Europe out

The Autumn of Life

of its own intellectual wealth by the teaching of love and true tolerance. Tagore nevertheless believes that there is still a seed of undying truth at the heart of Western culture, which will prove an unfailing light to the world. The duty of the educated classes it is, he said, to light that light, even if it demands sacrifices and self-denial.

In the summer of 1937 Tagore published a volume of Wellsian fairy tales for grown-ups, full of brilliant wit, but with a serious undertone, under the title of *Se* ("He"). He tells, for example, of an island inhabited by learned men, who need no stomach nor digestive organs, and live on concentrated foods. Another tale deals with the man who lost his body and travelled through the world looking for it.

This man, who, in the words of Robert Browning, is "still loftier than the world suspects" rang out the alarm once more in April and October 1937, when, after a short illness, he appealed to the conscience of mankind to save the civilization of the world from the threatening flood of barbarism. He lifted up his voice against imperialism, saying that the holiest rights of mankind have been trodden in the dust, Madrid, the proud centre of civilization and art, full of invaluable art treasures, is in flames. The country's irreplaceable relics have been destroyed. And in China, Japanese imperialism permits the bombardment of unfortified towns. This destructive onset of international fascism must be checked. It is necessary to aid democracy to protect civilization and culture.

CONCLUSION

A SURVEY of the manifold branches of Tagore's life-work impresses one equally with the nobility of his views and the harmonious balance of his personality. At this stage one cannot but pause over his monumental work and pay due reverence to his poetic genius. He has enriched Bengali literature immeasurably, indeed, it is he who first raised it to its present high rank. The scope of his work is very wide and his productivity has not slackened, though he is now old and his laurels weigh heavily upon him. Even now, in his advanced age, his work is rich in inspiration and his art betrays an unceasing search for new and better paths. Tagore has in truth been a revealer of new paths and a teacher of men. He seems to have in himself a strange power which urged him to the fore and made him a leader of men. He leaves a rich and undying literary heritage to future generations

His creative faculties were not condemned to find expression in one field only. The process of his development is in harmony with the tradition of Indian philosophy. From insight into the beauty of nature he arrived at a feeling of confidence in the destiny of mankind, from a conviction of the nobility of man's mission in the world he derives a wise philosophy, which culminates in his unhesitatingly positive attitude towards life and in his later conception of the divine nature of mankind. He is not interested in heaven or celestial deities. It is in this

Conclusion

world that man's progress towards perfection must take place, and therefore life in this world is the object of his preoccupations.]

We do not yet know whether India will have greater cause to be grateful to Rabindranath Tagore as the author of melodious verse, the dramatist, novelist, the teller of delightful tales and writer of philosophical essays, or Rabindranath Tagore, the apostle of enlightened humanity and ardent prophet of world unity. But there is no doubt that in both spheres this illustrious Eastern humanitarian will count for much. He is undoubtedly a great author, but he is at the same time one of the creators of the new man. His work is full of passionate dreams of a better, enlightened humanity. An accurate description of his fertile personality can be given only on the basis of a just valuation of his activities in all spheres, by the literary standards not merely of his own country, but of the entire world. Although his art is in the truest sense universal, he has carried the fame of his country abroad like no other of her sons. True to the national spirit of his country, he has worked like no other Indian for a closer contact between East and West. Tagore's universal humanitarianism is the corner-stone of the collaboration between East and West. If it is true, as Tagore believes, that the day which is to bring a fuller exchange between Asia and Europe in art, religion and literature is already dawning, then Rabindranath Tagore may be said to be the bright day-star which announces this new morn.